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A decorative bookplate with a central rectangular frame containing the text "HAPPY WITH EITHER". The frame is adorned with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork and floral motifs extending to the top, bottom, and sides. A small five-pointed star is positioned in the upper right corner of the design. The entire composition is enclosed within a double-line rectangular border.

HAPPY
WITH
EITHER







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HAPPY WITH EITHER.

A Novel.

BY
A. L. O. S.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.



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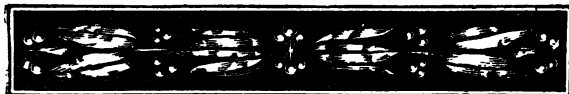
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HAPPY WITH EITHER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BORDER UNION.

IT is not our intention, kind reader, to devote this chapter to a history of the celebrated line of railway that bears, in technical language, the above title.

Altogether another kind of union is intended; one even more romantic than that famous "Waverley route," albeit it has been a kind of romance all through—in its name, in its traffic, in its junctions

(one of them, at least, without even a road to it), and principally in its non-dividend paying properties, which must have been a very romantic episode indeed to its unhappy shareholders, doubtless causing them to curse the day of their espousals, and bitterly to regret the "union" with so dowerless a bride.

But leaving metaphor and cast-iron to the sheep-trodden wilds of Liddesdale, let us return to our hero, whom we left speculating on the chances of Sir David Ramsey's will, and cultivating the good graces of his most probable heiress.

In his present uncertainty as to that vital point, the wildest consternation was the least that he felt when he heard that Mrs. Logan had gone North to visit her

son, and heard, besides, that certain matters and certain meetings were not quite so private as he and Miss Ramsey supposed.

"It's all gone 'where the woodbine twineth,' I doubt," said Andrew, beginning, since his sharp rebuke about "Old Goss," to cultivate elegant language, and quite scorning the commonplace that formerly would have risen most naturally to his lips.

Truly, matters did seem to be getting complicated, and circumstances over which he had no control were forcing themselves into his lot, bringing him to the standpoint that sooner or later all designing men must meet, and making him feel how unfit he was to "grapple with his evil star."

This malignant planet he at once identified with Mrs. Logan.

"Women," he said, with that lady in his eye, "are so gossiping and meddling! That young cub of hers might have come and gone a dozen times, and not done half the ill that she will with her restless tongue before she has been back half a day, never to speak of the stories she may have carried with her. Perhaps by this time she has set Milly against me; and if she comes home and tells Melicent——"

At the bare idea Andrew stamped his heel furiously down on the office floor, startling his subordinate, who would have been still more alarmed had he known that his master was just then figura-

tively putting Mrs. Logan *hors de combat*.

“I’ll have to do something desperate,” he said aloud, forgetting that the boy was present; and that youth, straightway accusing himself of some neglected duty, promptly rejoined—

“Please, sir, I’ll take care, sir, it doesn’t happen again.”

“You’ll take care and be d——d to you! What do you know about it?” said his master, quite ready to transfer his fury from an invisible to a visible foe; and the boy, not being ready with an answer, sat sullenly biting his pen, and voting his governor an ill-tempered fool.

Andrew passed a sleepless night, and next morning his perturbed visage bore

all the traces of extreme mental agitation.

"This uncertain kind of life is killing me," he said to Melicent, in answer to her anxious inquiries. "You don't know what it is to love a lady so much above you. It seems too good to be true, and as if it were not real, and that something would happen, and it's wearing me to death with anxiety."

"But, Andrew, you have my word, and the word of a Ramsey is as good as a bond," said the lady, with perfect faith in her statement.

Andrew thought he would prefer the bond, but he did not say so.

"It's a curious feeling," he went on, taking no notice of Melicent's remark; "it's

just like the doctrine of assurance," he added irreverently (for like all his countrymen, he had no lack of theology in his head, though it might never reach his heart). "The priests tell us that we should have it, and that we should feel it, and yet it won't come, or if it does come, it doesn't stay; and it's just the same with our love. Every now and again it comes over me that I'll lose you, and it's torturing me to death."

Melicent looked at his pale and haggard face, and could not doubt him; besides, it pleased her to hear that he prized her love so much, and it never struck her that this new phase had been so sudden in its inception.

"What can I do for you? How can I

make you believe in me?" she sweetly smiled.

Andrew shook his head mournfully.

"There's nothing but the priest and the altar, I doubt, that will ever be a sign and a seal to me that we are really to be man and wife. I wish I could shake off the feeling, but I cannot, let me try as I will."

"The priest and the altar!" ejaculated Miss Ramsey. "Why, Andrew, you must be losing your mind."

"That's what I sometimes think myself," said he; "and really, if you knew what I feel at times, you wouldn't be astonished. I'm losing my health, at any rate. This strain is going to do me up in a very short time."

Miss Ramsey did not know how short the time had been, and how little of that valuable commodity her lover had to work upon. Once let Mrs. Logan get home, and he knew by intuition that not only would she "take the wind out of his sails" more emphatically than she had ever done, but that "scudding under bare poles" would be all that was left for him.

His fair affianced gazed at him with intense love and sympathy.

"I wish I knew how to re-assure you," she said. Then, bethinking herself, she added, "But why you should doubt me, when I've promised not to, I'm sure I don't know."

"It isn't in the least that I doubt you. It's that something or somebody might

come between us," he said, with more truth in his words than usual; "and nothing but tying the knot will ease my heart," he added in a desperate way. "And it's nothing to be frightened for, either. We could just go on as we have done, only feeling that we really belonged to each other, and that nothing could part us. You have often met me at 'Habbie's Bed;' meet me in Carlisle, and we'll drive out to the old blacksmith, and he'll weild us together in no time."

And Andrew's fishy eyes became nearly brilliant, as Melicent made faint remonstrance.

"I should never be able to go through with it," she said. "How could we ever get there and back again without exciting

suspicion? I should so much like in some way to pay back your faithful love, and to feel that I quite belonged to you; but I don't see that it can be done—not in that way, at least."

"Look here, my dear love," putting his arm round her and clasping her hand in his. He had a soft, pleasant hand. Perhaps his strength lay in it, for at the touch, what remained to Melicent of strength of will or purpose entirely vanished, and the weakness of a trusting woman, blinded by the blindest of passions, was all that remained to her. "Look here, and I'll show you how it can be done," he said. "Sir David knows that I am wanted in London on Saturday to give my evidence on the game laws before a Committee of the

House. But though summoned for Saturday, I am confident I shall not be wanted till Monday. For old Macgrigor of Comrie is on the list before me, and as he'll answer every question by asking another, and fight over every individual sheep that's been so much as disturbed in its mind by a stray shot from a Cockney gun, it will take double the time to examine him that they're expecting. Of course, I'll leave here on Friday all the same, and if you'll come down to Carlisle by the mid-day train!—bless me!" he cried, putting his hand to his head, "I'm nearly as dazed with happiness as I was distraught with misery. To think that we may be man and wife by Saturday afternoon!"

His face was very close to Melicent's

now. It was too dangerous a subject to discuss audibly.

"I really cannot promise, Andrew," she said, with a little shiver, half of pleasure, half of pain ; "I will think over it—it is all so sudden and unexpected. I must have time for deliberation."

"The woman who deliberates is lost." The next day, when Andrew, too much excited to speak very coherently, stammered out—

"Well, then, am I to go ? and are you coming ?" she blushed, and softly said—

"Yes, you can go ; I will come if I can."

"It's all right, then," he said, with every line of his hard features softened into beaming smiles. It almost seemed as if it would come true, what he said.

“You don’t know half the man I’ll be, when I feel you’re mine for better and for worse.”

This ardent lover of Melicent’s prospects (which, since her assurance that she was Sir David’s favourite sister, and that he would never let his properties go to the Johnstones, he had been very much resting in), was becoming quite triumphant at the near realisation of his schemes. He could wait for the good fruit in the shape of house and lands till it pleased a kind providence to remove the obstacles ; but he had a great belief in being at the use of means, and doing a little to help himself.

Now his only fear was that Mrs. Logan might return before Saturday and spoil his little game. Barring that mischance, every-

thing seemed in a fair way to prosper. Later in the day, he met the minister, who told him that Mrs. Logan was expected by the last train on Saturday.

"It's neck or nothing," thought Andrew. "What a blessed chance that I was summoned to London this week, and that Macgrigor is such a dawdling, drawling old duffer."

Andrew was forgetting his *lingua* again; but a *lapsus* may well be excused to a man who was carrying all before him.

And what of the young loving heart, who, for anything he knew, was still trusting in him? Mrs. Logan might or might not have been in a position to unmask his deceit, and Milly might yet be regarding him as her future husband, disbelieving the

rumours she told him she had heard, and interpreting his letter according to her fondest desire. "I wish now," he reflected, "I had written more explicitly,—it would have made it less of a shock to her; but it would not have answered at the time, so it can't be helped. When we," meaning Melicent and himself, "when we come to our kingdom, I will see that Milly and her mother want for nothing; at least," he added, correcting, even in imagination, so liberal a promise, "at least, I will give them some kind of compensation if I turn them out of the Lodge."

This was all the thought he gave to Milly, and it resolved itself into a purely mercenary consideration. Yes; one other like reflection he hugged to his bosom—

"They'll never think of coming on me for damages, and if they did, they have got no proof."

50 "Would you mind me going down to Carlisle to-morrow?" asked Miss Ramsey of her brother on the Friday evening, after the factor had started for the south. She made superhuman efforts to speak calmly, and keep her voice steady, with only partial success; for she was not one of the cool hands that in exciting moments can conduct themselves with praiseworthy composure.

Hot-blooded people never are. The same want of self-command that results in unhappy and often inopportune exhibitions of "temper," equally shows itself in nerve and muscle when feeling of any kind is

excited ; and the trip to Carlisle, and all that it was to involve, would have quickened the pulses of the coldest blooded of bipeds, never to speak of tribes of living creatures who take secondary rank as colder still.

But though wanting in coolness, Melicent Ramsey was in no wise deficient in calculation ; and this led her to choose the hour in all the day when Sir David was more likely to be found propitious, when the mellifluous influence of a choice menu, and a still choicer vintage, had brought about a state of urbanity in which, in the earlier part of the day, it was hopeless to find him.

“ Carlisle !” said he, “ why not rather go to Edinburgh ? It’s a much better place for

shopping, and I suppose it's some gew-gaws you're after. I have been wanting to go to Edinburgh for some time back myself, if this wretched foot would let me."

Melicent was in despair. Sir David was full of contradiction; had she proposed Edinburgh, most likely he would have suggested Carlisle. But now that he had got Edinburgh into his head, how was it to be driven out again? *Coute qu'il coute*—Carlisle it must be; or she must play her true (?) lover false.

"You will be stronger next week," she said, "and I should like so very much to go to Edinburgh with you, if you can take me. It would be such a very jolly thing to do: and I could go to Carlisle to—

morrow, while you are nursing your poor foot."

"I cannot think of your travelling alone, my dear," said her affectionate brother ; "if you go at all, you must wait till I am well enough to accompany you. It's quite a long journey, and not at all *comme il faut* for Miss Ramsey of Otterburn to be flying about the country by herself."

Sir David had old-world notions of chaperones and duennas for young damsels of noble houses, and considered it only fit for the daughters of the people to roam about at their own sweet wills.

"I thought of taking Foster with me," said Melicent ; "she belongs to Carlisle, and could go to her friends while I am doing commissions ;" and she gulped down

her almost choking emotion as she thought of the one trying commission she had undertaken, and it suddenly came over her that perhaps it would be as well if her brother peremptorily forbade her going. Still, she was bound to make the attempt, and resumed—

“If you wish it, Wright could go also in attendance. I think he has been wanting to match some of the dinner crystal, and you know we got the every-day set from Carlisle.”

“Hum!” said Sir David, in much the same tone as an ordinary mortal would have said “humbug.” But when Sir David used expletives, he did it in what he considered a gentlemanly style, scorning all slang and coarse phrases as corrupt and

unmanly. So he simply said "hum," but made no further opposition, only sitting with his under lip pursed out, in sullen silence.

This silence Melicent took for consent; and weary with the controversy she had little heart to carry on, she gladly retired to the drawing-room, where, in the sweetest of tones, she told the old butler, as he brought up the tea, that he could attend her to Carlisle next day, "and replace the broken glass you know, Wright."

It was the first time Wright had heard of it, and he was very much inclined to put in a disclaimer; but the servants at Otterburn knew by experience that when their young mistress advanced an opinion it was safer not to controvert it.

Next morning Miss Ramsey and her two attendants went by the express train to Carlisle, and though Andrew Macdonald durst not put in an appearance, a carriage awaited her at the station, into which (having first got rid of Wright and Foster by informing them that she was going to pay a visit in the neighbourhood, and would not want them) she entered, and was driven rapidly off through the town and "over the bridges," as the Carlisle people call their highway across the Eden; then through the pretty, quaint little village of Stanwix, with its villas of "the wealthy cit, grown old in trade," standing side by side with the far more picturesque cottages of the aborigines, whose inhabitants were so accustomed to seeing post carriages (or

chaises as they called them, for that time-honoured appellation still lingered on the tongues of unsophisticated rustics) holding Gretna-wards, that Miss Ramsey's progress excited far less attention than she imagined. To herself, of course, it was the one runaway match of the season. The air seemed alive with it, the faces she passed seemed full of it, the very street boys, who from instinct made little darts after the carriage, and for a moment hung on behind, appeared to Melicent to know that she was travelling under peculiar circumstances; while all the time it was only herself, and perhaps her charioteer—who, honest man, with all the weakness of his class, would no doubt be wondering to what extent he might calculate on the "shiners"—that

knew anything about it, or even who cared.

Presently the lady nervously began to wonder what had become of her bridegroom; for though it was apparent that he had been most punctilious about arrangements, he had been anything but explicit; and the poor lady began to fear that if she arrived at Gretna unknown and alone, the absurdity of the situation might induce the people to be rude to her. But she was saved this humiliation. As the carriage drew up at the little wayside toll, a respectable-looking old man, with a bald head, and wearing a decent black coat, received and conducted her into the house; and almost before she had taken in the surroundings, in the gloomy little parlour

to which he led her, she found herself in Mr. Macdonald's arms, and felt that she had not bartered name and fame in vain.

"The lady will be ready to go back in two minutes," said Andrew. "Tell the coachman to turn the horses' heads, will you?"

This to the old priest. His own head was not in the least turned ; business was always uppermost with him, and, the occasion notwithstanding, it was uppermost still. Love or hate, peace or war, no matter what he took up, it was always the business of the moment, and to be attended to as such ; and it was this faculty of being always devoted to business that made him so valuable a factor.

So, with his arms round his victim, he coolly arranged for her return, and Melicent heard with some little dismay that she was only to be allowed "two minutes" of wedded bliss.

"Then you are not going back with us either?" she asked.

Andrew was much inclined to curse her folly—after all his trouble not to leave a trace of the affair, to speak of going back together! but he restrained himself, and merely said, taking his place by her side—

"Wait till after the ceremony, and I'll tell my wife all about it."

The light came back to Melicent's face. The one thing so long looked for had come at last, and though accompanied by

many painful accessories (when do our anticipated pleasures ever come to us without some such?) yet to be really Andrew's wife, even under the most unpropitious of circumstances, seemed to be the "silver lining" to Miss Ramsey's present "cloud."

The short ceremony—scarcely to be called such—was soon completed. Anything more bald and unimposing, in what it travestied, was hardly to be imagined, yet for practical purposes as valid as if both civil and ecclesiastical authorities had conspired together to give Melicent over into the unscrupulous hands of her now liege lord. A little less sentimental, somewhat more formal—excepting for the witnesses a mere repetition of the vows

they had already exchanged at "Habbe's Bed," and the step that could never be retraced was taken, the union that could never be dissolved was consummated, and by the law of Scotland this simple but unmistakable declaration of marriage would serve Andrew Macdonald's purpose in every court of justice in the land.

The transaction was duly registered in a well-thumbed volume kept for the purpose ; and a copy, which the old priest called their "marriage lines," duly signed by them both, and of which he bade the lady take the best of care, was handed to her. But the new made husband exercised his prerogative for the first time by quietly relieving her of it and putting it

into his pocket, and she gave token of becoming a dutiful wife by meekly submitting.

Andrew's face had assumed its habitual hard, business-like look—the aspect it usually wore to those from whom he had nothing to gain, but one with which his young wife was strangely unfamiliar. The end was gained. No need, therefore, to simulate unfelt emotions now. Melicent was completely in his power, and he soon began to show that he knew it.

“Now the sooner you're back to Carlisle, the better,” he said. “Every moment is of consequence, and you must see what a risk it would be for us to return together. I have managed things so that the coachman has never even set eyes on your bride-

groom—perhaps does not even fully understand your errand. The old priest will put you into the carriage, and I defy anyone but him and the witnesses, who of course know how to keep dark, to prove that we were even here together.”

His cold manner infected Melicent, and besides, her pride was up in arms, and she would show him that she could be as cool and business-like as himself.

“Good-bye, good-wife !” he said, with an ill-timed attempt at jocularitv, and he held out his hand.

Melicent took it, and tried to return the cold farewell. But instead of the words that should have come to her lips, the unbidden tears—for woman at her strongest

is only the weaker vessel still—welled up to her eyes.

The semi-fossiliferous petrification that did duty in Macdonald's bosom appeared to be touched. He had played the hypocrite so often in word and gesture, that it cost him no effort to reassume the character.

"Dearest," he said, "this parting is as hard for me as for you. Say good-bye, and let us get it over."

He had coolly seated himself in the easiest-looking of the old priest's chairs, and, unlover-like, had left her standing beside him; but the apparent candour and half tenderness of the words disarmed her pride.

"Poor Andrew," she said, unaware how much misplaced was the sympathy. "Do

you, too, feel it so hard?" And she stroked back the straight, smooth-lying hair from a rather rugged brow, and imprinted a wifely kiss there.

"What can it be but hard?" he said, half impatiently.

It was his turn to domineer now, and he hurried her out into the little passage, where the old man waited to conduct her to the carriage.

"Happier days to ye, mem, and soon," he said; for he had never before seen a new made couple depart separately, and conjectured within himself that some very exceptional circumstances over-ruled their plans.

"It's as ill-faured wedding as e'er I saw," he said to his own better half, after

the bridegroom, too, had taken his leave.
“ He’s a cool chap, yon, and she’s a haughty
dame. They’ll be back within the twelve-
month to get this day’s work undone, as
I’m a living man.”



CHAPTER II.

HAPPY—WITH NEITHER.

“HAS Cousin Melicent been ill since I left home?” asked Mrs. Logan of her husband, as they walked back from church the following day. “She’s dreadfully changed for the time! I even noticed some grey hairs about her temples.”

Certainly, Miss Ramsey looked as unbridelike as it was possible for a handsome, well-dressed woman to be, with a wan face, full of forced smiles when spoken

to, relapsing, when in repose, into a more perfect index of the unsatisfied heart within. For no sooner was the rash and un-called-for act committed, than the trust which had never been shaken before began most unaccountably to desert her, and the eyes of her understanding — lately so helplessly blinded—seemed suddenly to open, and the transaction and its concomitants present themselves in truer colours for calm and impartial consideration.

Andrew had thrown off his disguise all too quickly, and the short glimpse she had got of how he looked as a married man had not inspired her with confidence.

She could not conceal from herself that he had been needlessly cool, and impatiently solicitous for the parting. She

saw the propriety of going when he said "Go ;" but, like another foolishly fond wife of another callous husband, she had pleaded with her eyes, if not with her lips, that he should "say it lovingly," and hardly won her end. Then, when too late, she began to torment herself with questions and vain regrets. Could he really love her as he said ? and curiously, for the first time, in spite of George Logan's warnings, there rose up for answer a vision of a sweet young face in the Highlands, a kind of counterpart of her own, who might in reality possess the heart of him to whom she had given both heart and hand.

She was jaded and tired—worn out in mind and body with excitement and

fatigue—and these painful thoughts were as much the natural outcome of the one as the other. But they served to keep her tossing on her pillow, and scare away the rest and sleep which might have restored her to love and hope.

Dispirited and dissatisfied, she went out to church for no better or holier motive than to save appearances, and forgot that in the sanctuary she might have found a peace that the world could neither give nor take away. But for want of seeking she missed the blessing, and missed her object too, for she could not deceive the keen quick eyes of Mrs. Logan, and even the minister, when appealed to, confessed that he thought her looking ill.

“She has had some trouble, either of mind or body, I can see,” said Mrs. Logan; “I’ll go up to-morrow and ask for her.”

But Mrs. Logan had more business on hands than simply to make inquiries. She had much to communicate, the result of her observations in the Highlands; and on Monday morning, when Mr. Macdonald was giving his evidence on the working of the game laws before a committee of the House of Commons, and driving his bewildered examiners all but dazed with his statistics and figures, Mrs. Logan was giving her evidence of another sort, and before a still more select audience, and equally driving unfortunate Melicent out of her senses by her facts and statements.

"You have no idea what a charming sweet girl your niece is," she began, "and I dare say you will as little guess that Mr. Macdonald and she are engaged to be married, and have been all along."

Mrs. Logan put it as broadly as she could, for in her ignorance she thought that Miss Ramsey could not be too much impressed by it. She little knew what an impression she had made already, and mistaking Melicent's helpless silence for indifference, she went on—

"It is true there is a little hitch just at the present time—some lover's quarrel, I fancy; but the poor girl is very much tried by the suspense she is kept in; indeed, it has thrown her into very bad health, and Mrs.

Johnstone is so unhappy—not that she ever quite approved of the match for her daughter, but on poor Milly's account, who is really very much cut up about it. She used to call him 'Donald,' it seems, and herself his little wife, and it is only quite lately that he gave her to understand that they might be married soon and come to Otterburn together."

Mrs. Logan had plenty of time to explain herself, for naturally Melicent was far past interrupting her. She had purposely, from some feeling of delicacy, kept her face turned away while narrating Milly's sorrows, but having to stop at last from sheer want of breath, she stole a glance at her companion, and was shocked to see the effect her words had produced.

She sprang up and caught her hand—it was icy cold ; her eyes were set and staring, and her breath came and went in spasmodic gasps.

“Melicent, what ails you?” she cried; “oh, what have I done? let me get some help!”

“Don’t! don’t!” gasped Melicent, “I’ll be—all right presently; it’s here,” she said, pressing her disengaged hand over the region of the heart, “I take that — sort of thing — now, do you know?”

“Can I get you anything? Won’t you lie down?” suggested Mrs. Logan.

“Oh, no; lying down won’t do any good! I must suffer a little—perhaps I shall never get quite over it.”

“Dear me, it must be all true,” thought Mrs. Logan. She little guessed its full import to the proud, sensitive, tender woman, who had stooped to one so far beneath her and found, when too late, that she was not even sole mistress of his heart. His unprincipled conduct to her niece disgusted her, but his want of faith to herself mortified and wounded her. Had he only proved false to Milly, in time she might have looked over it; but stung to the quick that he should have dared to trifle with herself, her outraged feelings knew no bounds; and after the worst symptoms had passed off, and Mrs. Logan had taken her departure, it seemed as if the Hall could scarcely contain her till she had written to cast him off.

As yet no letter had passed between them. Andrew, with his usual regard to prudence, had not considered that it would be quite safe for him to write ; but it had been arranged that Melicent was to commit herself to paper that morning, and she was actually sitting down for the purpose when Mrs. Logan was announced.

What a different effusion it would have been but for Mrs. Logan's visit ! She had had a good night's rest, and with returning strength had come back her faith in the man she had married, and in the world, which, in her weakness, had seemed about to crumble into dust and ashes in her hands. She blamed herself that she had judged him so hardly ; and a

smile had hovered about her sweet mouth all morning, as she thought how she would call him her dear husband, and conclude his loving wife. She even intended assuming her new name, and had coloured with pride and pleasure as she wrote "Melicent Macdonald" on a scrap of paper. Alas! it was the first and the last time she wrote it, and then tore it into fragments.

Out of this ecstatic feeling she was rudely awakened by Mrs. Logan's overwhelming disclosures; and the reaction was all the greater, coming so suddenly on the *couleur de rose* in which she had managed to envelop her hero. Now what a change! With hard firm lines—not good to look upon—around her mouth,

and angry frowning brow, she penned her letter.

“ Miss Ramsey has just received some information that will be a bar to any further intercourse between her and Mr. Macdonald. Miss Ramsey spares herself the pain of indicating its nature, but her decision is final ; and if Mr. Macdonald attempts to resume his position at Otterburn Hall, Miss Ramsey will seek Sir David's Ramsey's protection, at all hazards and at any cost.”

Andrew had had a very successful day at the Committee Room. He had unburdened himself, to his own intense satisfaction, of any amount of irrelevant matter, and heaped on the heads of the helpless senators so much unnecessary information, that

after one or two ineffectual attempts to stop him, they had resigned themselves to his didactic tone in hopeless despair.

Triumphant and arrogant he returned to his hotel, and when next morning Melicent's letter reached him, he chuckled to himself with ill-concealed glee.

"If once the old boy would 'kick the bucket,'" he said to himself, "I'll take a different position in the Committee Rooms, for a seat in the House would be the least I would stop at;" and then he leisurely proceeded to open and read his young wife's letter. As he did so, his visage—so lately drawn up into something between a smile and a sneer—gradually elongated, and his cheeks flushed to a copper red.

“The storm has burst then, has it?” he said. “It’s hot and heavy, but that’s no more than I looked for; but it won’t do, young woman,” he continued, apostrophising the absent writer. “You can’t marry a man one day and unmarry him the next; you’re no more Miss Ramsey now, than I’m the Pope of Rome.” Presently he resumed, “It’s awkward, though, being thrown out of the place. I’ll have to write and resign; I suppose that’s what my haughty madam intends, and it won’t do to drive her to the folly she threatens just yet. I’ll gang my ain gait, and she may gang hers in the meantime,” he added, relapsing at the crisis into his mother-tongue. “If ever she’s worth the lift-

ing, I'll lift her ; at least, I'll lift the baw-bees."

Having come to this conclusion, Mr. Macdonald's next step was to cast about for another situation ; and with the undoubted talents for that particular kind of work he was allowed on all hands to possess, and the success that at this point of his career waited on his every effort, a first-rate appointment was soon placed at his disposal.

He had taken no notice of Melicent's letter, expecting that, as formerly, a dignified silence would best bring her to reason ; but he penned a not very respectful letter to Sir David, resigning the factorship of the Otterburn and Ardentiny estates. And the poor old gentleman, lost between

amazement and indignation, would not even condescend to tell his sister of the blow he had received.

Thus Melicent remained in utter ignorance of how the matrimonial fracas was progressing; but her wrath, being too well nursed to cool, had not as yet given place to any of the minor passions, and she had never even allowed herself to wonder what her husband was doing, when a few days later Sir David, who had a habit ("common to the race" of male creatures) of culling *à la discrétion*, for the entertainment of his companion, short and incoherent extracts from the public prints, dashed as usual right into the middle of what, as a whole, would have been a most interesting paragraph.

“‘And has been appointed,’” read Sir David, “‘to the very important post of’—deuce take him,” commented the reader, “how did he get it without a recommendation from me? ‘at a salary,’” he resumed, “‘of,’ who the devil cares, ‘and will enter on his new duties——’ D—n both him and his duties!” finished up the irascible and inconsiderate old gentleman.

This fragmentary announcement was like the tortures of the Inquisition to Melicent. She guessed at once to whom it would refer; but she durst not ask a question, and she was unable to find a remark.

“You don’t seem to have a word to say to it!” cried her brother.

Melicent smiled one of her sweetest

smiles. "You know so much better about it than I do," she replied.

Perhaps she alluded to the paragraph, for in other respects Sir David could not be said to be very much *au fait* of the subject. Then, feeling unequal to more, she rose to leave the room.

"Don't go," said her brother, "I have something to say to you."

"In a moment," she gasped out, as steadily as she could.

A return of the dreaded heart spasms she felt was coming on, and she was unwilling that her brother should be alarmed and disturbed by the sight of suffering he could not alleviate.

"What is to become of me?" she cried when she reached her own room, and threw

herself on the couch, from which breathlessness soon compelled her to rise. "Am I to lose all health and strength, too, at one blow? or is death coming to put an end to my sorrows?"

It seemed to her as if it were, and the dreaded enemy, whose very name, when the smiling of fortune was beguiling, she had thought so terrible, was now almost hailed as a deliverer from terrors worse than his own.

"Oh that it could be undone!" she cried, referring to the work of that unfortunate day. Then a more severe spasm convulsed her frame, and she sank to the couch again in mortal agony.

"How long can I survive it?" she moaned—and just then Foster came into

the room, and held up her hands when she saw the pitiful state in which her mistress was.

“Wouldn’t you see the doctor, miss?” she said, “he might give you ladumy or morphium, or some such, which it might ease you.”

“I shall be better presently, Foster; but—Oh this dreadful pain!—will you go to Wright and get me some brandy?”

This was the first time she had openly asked for a stimulant, though she had been in the habit for some months back of taking it (as she supposed unknown to her maid) from a private store, of which she kept the key. But no ordinary locksmith ever came between Foster and her thirst for knowledge of a particular kind; and

perhaps "Davy Jones' locker" might be instanced as the only receptacle whose mysterious depths she had never desired to sound. But at the same time she was a faithful abigail to her mistress, and never betrayed her weakness to anyone but Wright, for whom she cherished a secret passion—"that sort of thing," as Miss Ramsey would lucidly have described it, not being confined to either age or station, and abigails being no more panoplied against its attacks than their betters.

"She's been and asked me right out for it to-day," she said, "and you're to send her some." And the butler did not need to inquire what was wanted, but poured out a glassful of the strongest brandy.

"She might just as well have been open with it from the first," continued Foster, aggrieved that her mistress should have withheld this confidence; "which I allus 'ad a feeling that she'd come to it in the end."

"I have been longer than I expected," said Melicent, when, some hours later, she rejoined her brother. "I had some orders to give to Foster, and to see them executed."

"I fear that woman annoys you, my dear," said Sir David, with unusual thoughtfulness. "You look put out, even pale, I would almost say."

"Do I?" languidly smiled Melicent. "She is stupid, I must confess, but she means well, poor soul, and takes a scolding

pleasantly. What have you got to talk about ?”

“ Oh ! this wretched business, of course. If the selfish fellow had only waited a year or two, till that young blockhead Logan, had gained some experience——”

“ What would you say to giving George a chance ?” broke in Melicent. “ He is so clever and all that, and would soon be up in all the kind of work, don’t you think ? Suppose you send for him, and ask him if he thinks himself fit for it.”

“ Fit for four hundred a year !” ejaculated the Baronet. “ What confounded fools women are, too,” he muttered ; “ as if a young sprig like him would own himself unfit for the throne of England, if it was offered to him.”

Melicent did not attempt to vindicate either her much maligned sex, or her cousin George; and next day she was told to write to young Logan, and tell him that Sir David wished to see him at once.

Meantime, Macdonald went on his way—it might almost be said—rejoicing, and gave no sign. Had he lived in ancient times, his career might have furnished another source of “envy” to the honest patriarch who candidly owned to that unholy feeling when he “saw the prosperity of the wicked.” For the new post to which Sir David Ramsey’s late factor had been appointed was twice as important and lucrative as the old. Therefore, from a mere worldly point of view, he was quite

entitled to let "pride compass him about as a chain," and to "speak loftily."

So far as his new made wife was concerned, he did not speak at all. He had already gauged Melicent's powers of endurance, and judged that, as in former times, her woman's heart would soon give way.

Unscrupulous himself, he had no great reason to assign a high standard of principle to the lady who had contracted a secret marriage with him; and he was too little of a philosopher to know that poor weak human nature can allow considerable licence to itself, and at the same time exact the most undeviating rectitude from others.

"I bide my time," said Andrew to him-

self. Like a beast of prey from its lair, when the hunger of passion or self-interest called him to action, he could pounce on his victim with relentless cruelty.



CHAPTER II.

SOME FLANK MOVEMENTS.

IN obedience to Melicent's summons, George Logan lost no time in hastening to Otterburn, not even stopping to rush over to the lodge to take a tender farewell of Milly, as Macdonald would certainly have had to do, but leaving by the first train, and going direct to the Hall ; for he did not know how important Sir David's business, or how urgent it might be. As the Baronet was well satisfied

with his promptitude, the young man had every reason to be the same, for he walked down to the Manse fully promoted to the office of factor, before he had quite taken in the fact of its being vacant.

Sir David was quite correct about George's youthful confidence in himself and his powers of management; but poor Mrs. Logan was somewhat alarmed at the humble, serious tones in which her usually merry boy announced his good fortune.

"I wish he isn't fey," she said to her husband, overlooking the fact that age and responsibility were doing their natural work with George, who was never thoughtless and inconsiderate, but full of the animal spirits of a healthy, buoyant

youth—exactly the sort of young fellow in whom is the making of a first-rate man.

“How wretchedly ill Cousin Melicent looks!” he said. “I wonder if this sudden turn of affairs has anything to do with her and Macdonald?”

This was to his mother; but that prudent lady kept her own counsel, and said nothing to George of what she had witnessed since her return; neither did he tell his mother that his cousin had asked him to come up to the Hall in the early morning.

“I want to talk to you about something very private, George,” she had said, “and you won’t mention it to anyone, not even to your mother,” and George had promised compliance to both requests.

A strange confidant George seemed for such a subject, and yet Melicent could not have chosen one more suitable; and the young man tried hard to justify her choice by restraining his surprise, and listening to her unhappy story with a business-like composure he was far from feeling.

"He's a muff and a cad!" he broke out at last, when he could stand it no longer. "Shall I go and horsewhip him, Cousin Melicent?"

"Oh, hush, George!" she said, pressing her hand over her weak heart. "Only a short week back, I thought there was none in all the world to compare to him."

"For heartless double-dealing I don't believe you could match him," said

George ; and then, seeing Melicent's look of pain, "but I won't, dear cousin, if it vexes you, only it's too dreadful to contemplate unmoved;" and his thoughts taking wing to one whose sweet apparition often hovered about his mind's eye, "And poor Milly, too !" he sighed ; "I doubt if she's convinced to this day, and for all his heartless conduct to her, that he is not—well, to put it mildly—everything that he should be. Might I not give Miss Johnstone a hint of what you have been telling me, Cousin Melicent ?"

Melicent did not at once reply. She was sitting with one hand still pressed tightly over her heart, while the other sustained her aching, throbbing head. The image of despairing sorrow she

seemed, and George's honest manly heart was wrung to see her brought so low.

"Not if it will hurt you, cousin," he said; "only I thought it would be the best cure for Milly."

"Happy Milly! unhappy me!" cried Melicent. "She has hope before her; I have only darkness and despair. Yes, George, you can tell her all; it is better she should know. But I have thought so much of my own trouble, I have taken little care for hers, only I would not have my sister know, not in the meantime, at least. If ever we become reconciled, I can tell her myself. Reconciled, indeed! Agnes did no harm to me; but he never so much as named them. I see it all

now, and we, in our egotistical pride, had nearly forgotten their existence."

"I don't wish to be a tell-tale, Cousin Melicent," said George, "but, do you know, he made Miss Johnstone believe that he scarcely knew you to speak to."

"Oh, George!" she said, "it is almost more than I can bear, when I look back now and see through it all; and when it comes over me what I have done, and how blinded and foolish I have been, I can scarcely tell you how I feel. One thing you must do for me—you must go down to that ill-fated place, and try if the entry of that wretched day's work can in any way be obliterated. It's a miserable errand for you, I know, but who could I send if not you? See, here is money," as she pulled

open a cabinet drawer, "take any amount, they say it is a golden key and will compass all things."

"I'll go at once, dear cousin," replied George, "but for taking a sum of money, I don't know about that. Of course, if the old man sees his way to obliging you, I would pay him handsomely for his trouble ; but as for offering him a lot of money, I'm afraid it would look like a bribe ; short of that, I'll do my utmost."

George went the very next morning, on what was truly "a miserable errand," and when, after a good deal of circumlocution—for George for once was actually at a loss for words to explain himself—he got the old priest to understand what was wanted, that sage binder of foolish hearts,

in a much shorter time, showed him how impossible and unjust it would be to tamper with the book of register.

“It might suit that particular couple weel eneuch,” said he, “I’m no saying that it wadn’t, they did na look to me as if they wad ever pu’ weel thegether; neither o’ them ony youths either! ‘Auld fules’—ye ken the rest o’t, young sir, but that’s neither here nor there. There’s evidence within this buke,” laying his hand on the volume, and drawing himself up with a full sense of the dignity he derived from its importance; “there’s evidence that affects some o’ the best estates in the kingdom; and it wad be maunifestly unfair to meddle wi’ that evidence, or weaken it in any way, as defacing an entry might do. Na! na!

it canna be done, we maun menteen the integrity o' the register ; but I'll tell ye what I can do, if it's only, as ye say, exposure the leddy dreads, I'll clap a bit wafer on the twa corners, and start the niest entry owre the leaf, and that will keep a' secure, for it will ne'er be turned excep' by some that has business o' their ain, and no taken up wi' other folks'."

"Thank you," said George, "if that's the best you can do for us, and there's something to buy the wafers."

It was not what Melicent would have liked, for she had an idea that if she could get hold of this too public record of what she now regarded as her folly and her shame, she would somehow be more the mistress of her destiny ; but it was the

utmost she could obtain. Like many another, she found the difficulty, nay, the impossibility, of retracing her false step. What could she expect, but that it would hang like an ominous cloud on all the horizon of her future? Happy might she count herself if it did not burst over her devoted head.

The following week George Logan returned to Ardentiny, and after that, it may be believed, he did not wait to let the grass—or more correctly speaking, the heather—grow under his feet, till he made an errand to the Lodge.

Milly was slowly recovering from her illness, which, being more mental than physical, had been tedious and uncertain; not that her mind had been in the least un-

hinged, but her nervous system had received a shock sufficient to cause considerable lowering of the vital power, and consequent depression. Even yet she looked listless and spiritless, and did not rouse herself when George announced Macdonald's resignation of the factorship and his own appointment.

"There must be a great big hole in Milly's heart," said George to himself. "Was it at school or at college that I learned 'Nature abhors a vacuum'?—Will you come out, Miss Johnstone, and take a turn down the road?" he said aloud. "We will not have many evenings together now. I will be returning to Otterburn soon."

And Milly quietly got her hat and went with him.

Alas for poor George ! She heard unmoved the announcement that in Macdonald's time would have given her so much distress. She might miss the new factor a little, but that would be all. He was a lively companion, but liveliness, rather than otherwise, jarred on her now, and it was only by an effort, unnatural in one so young, that she was able to follow the sprightly sallies in which he often indulged.

"Miss Johnstone, I have something very private and particular to say to you," he began, as soon as they had cleared the Lodge grounds, which were of no great extent; and Milly blushed and looked down, but did not seem at all annoyed. "The dear little puss !" thought George.

“What if I tell my own story, and not Cousin Melicent’s at all? But no, duty before pleasure; and if she has still any lingering hopes of that unmitigated scoundrel, it may serve effectually to snuff them out.—It’s almost a message from your aunt. It was quite a trial for her to send it, but she fancied you ought to know.”

By the time he had finished the sad story, Milly was quietly weeping. She did everything quietly now. Emotion seemed almost dead within her, and a hopeless repose to have taken possession of her.

“Poor Aunt Melicent!” she sobbed; “how very hard for her—harder than even for me—only I had loved him longer.”

It was the first time she had alluded to her trouble to George, and he did not quite know what to make of her candour. It was no doubt flattering to be made a friend and confident of, but still it was not precisely the footing he wished to establish between them. But he saw that Milly was in no mood then for accepting another suitor, and wisely abstained from wounding her feelings by a premature disclosure of his own.



CHAPTER IV.

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE AND ON WITH
THE NEW.

UNDER this unpromising aspect of affairs, George was obliged to bring his small stock of patience and resignation to the front, and make the most of it. Neither aunt nor niece could be said to be in the enjoyment of much happiness, but they at least had the luxury of grief to console them, while poor young George had only the hope deferred that maketh the heart

sick. They both understood pretty well the extent of their misfortunes, but he could not as yet estimate the amount of good that was in store for him, and the one position is to the full as embarrassing as the other.

To leave Ardentiny at so critical a time was not to be thought of. Sir David's affairs were all very well, and "would always," as George quoted from the approved formula of business circulars, "engage his best attention;" but at present his duty to Sir David's niece seemed paramount to all other details, and the threatened departure, which Milly heard of with so much unconcern, was delayed from day to day, and from week to week, and yet the unfortunate young man could not see that he

was making much progress, or even whether he was doing himself good or ill by his presence.

With some difficulty the musical evenings were re-established, but all the spirit seemed to have gone out of them. They were the same, but how different! Smiles that had more of tears than of laughter in them were the utmost that George could win, and but for Mrs. Johnstone, who at this juncture was his firm and unfailing ally, he might have succumbed to Milly's persistent grief, and become a prey to the same listless indifference with which she went about her once favourite pursuits.

George had serious thoughts of sending for his mother again, but it did not seem a case for her interference, and he would have

been rather puzzled how to put it, had he decided on requesting her assistance.

As with music, so with poetry. And when George in desperation took down "Locksley Hall," and with a pathos born of the wildest experience read—

"Trust me, cousin, all the current of my being sets to thee."

There was no doubt but that—

"On her pallid cheek and forehead came a colour and a light."

But then it seemed most probable that the old love was the occasion of the emotion, and not the new.

"Can't you forget it?" said George at last, after the sixth reading, given at suit-

able intervals, and always with the same apparent result.

Milly looked up astonished.

"Forget it!" she echoed; "on the contrary, I can nearly repeat it all, you have read it so many times lately."

"Ah!" said George, quick enough to seize the happy chance, "if you would but repeat it? Just begin at 'Trust me'—it's the spiciest bit in the piece," said he apologetically; "just look me in the face and say it." And he tried to laugh in an easy natural way, but it was a failure, and Milly saw it and demurely replied—

"I'm not your Cousin Amy, you know; the lines that suit me best are—

" 'This is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering
happier things.' "

George was in despair. "I doubt she thinks of nothing but that wretched fellow, yet," he thought; "perhaps I had better write, for she doesn't seem to comprehend what I say. I wonder what my mother would advise, were I to ask her?"

But, unasked, that clever little woman came forward at the proper moment, and almost without knowing it, rendered her boy the most effectual assistance by summoning him home.

She had a lurking suspicion, from the tone of his letters and his prolonged absence, that all was not going well with him, and as she could not go North just then to make an inspection, the next best thing was to have him down. And George came, and turned himself inside

out, as he called it, at his mother's bidding.

"You're simply making a fool of yourself, my boy," she said, after surveying him mentally and bodily. "Go back to your work at the Hall, and try if you can amuse Melicent a little—she has looked like a 'maiden all forlorn' for some time; but don't speak or think of Ardentiny for a couple of months at the soonest."

George did as he was bid, and for five or six weeks he struggled manfully to endure his exile; but one fine morning he left a note for his mother, saying that if she wanted him, he would be found in Mrs. Johnstone's drawing-room. And sure enough he was seated there that same evening, wearied a little with his early start

and long journey, but not too tired to see that Milly was looking brighter, and gave him a warmer welcome, and altogether was at some pains to show she was more than pleased to have him back again.

“You’re too much fatigued for music to night, I see, Mr. Logan,” she said; “if you are rested to-morrow, perhaps you will come up. I have got a new song to try over.”

The words were simple words enough, but the manner of saying them, and her sweet confiding look, sent a thrill of pleasure and hope to the young man’s heart. He would fain have kissed the little hand she gave him; but he just held it for a moment, and she did not attempt to withdraw it.

In spite of his fatigue, George trod on air that evening as he walked home, and the next night found the young lover hard at work over the new song.

Miss Johnstone had often wished George out of the way, that she might brood in secret over her sorrow, undisturbed ; but no sooner had she got her wish, than with the perversity of human nature she straightway began to miss the occasion of it, and then she discovered for herself the alarming fact that he had insensibly become an essential part of her happiness, and that without him she could neither carry on pleasure nor pain. The time that had been so long to him had been little less so to her, and with her usual innocent

frankness, she made no secret of her feelings.

"I'm so glad you have come back, Mr. Logan; it was really very dull while you were gone," she said between the intervals of the singing.

George had been standing by her side while they sang, but now she had made room for him on the ottoman beside her.

"Are you going to be my 'Cousin Amy' now?" he asked, in a low and earnest voice, while he captured the hand that was still running over the chords of the song, and imprisoned it within his own.

"'Cousin Amy' wasn't true!" she said softly. "Had I not better just be Milly?"

“A thousand times better, my darling, so that you’re wholly mine !”

George’s arm was round Milly now, and her head had dropped confidently on his shoulder. One peachy cheek lay temptingly within his reach, and he kissed it tenderly, as if he almost feared his bushy beard might brush off the bloom.

“Oh, George! it’s so soon,” she murmured, and then, rather inconsistently, “and I thought you would never care for me after my thinking so much of——” but no name was forthcoming.

“If I cared for you for nothing else, I would love you for being so true to Macdonald,” said George gallantly; “but he is your uncle now, you know, Milly. You must try and forget him, and if you’ll just

put me in his place, you'll find what a help and comfort it will be to you."

Milly lifted her head to smile up at the audacity of her handsome wooer. Their lips met, and from that moment two individual existences became fused together — two separate selves passed out of sight, to evolve in oneness, a perfect whole.

"First come to my mother," said Milly presently, bethinking herself rather tardily of this neglected duty. "If I had taken her advice before, I would have been saved all this trouble; she seemed to see from the first how it was to end. I must not make any promises again without consulting her."

The two young lovers soon stood before

Mrs. Johnstone, and received her glad assent to George's proposal.

"I am entirely satisfied this time, Melicent," she said, with significant emphasis, "and I hope, Mr. Logan, she'll be as good a wife as she has been a daughter."

George tried to respond by politely intimating how willingly he made the venture; but formality was not in his line, and as he could not quote poetry or indulge in absurd remarks with Mrs. Johnstone, it was rather a break-down. However, he stayed and spent the remainder of the evening, and a happier trio—for Milly would not allow her mother to leave the room—could scarcely be imagined.

"You'll have plenty of time to be alone,

mother, when I go off with George," laughed Milly, with much of the old joyous playfulness back again.

"Is the parting to be so soon, then, my child?" she asked; and then she added, with much dignity, "I mean to write to my brother to-morrow. I have always intended to do so in the event of any crisis in my daughter's life, and the time for it has now arrived."

The bare mention of such a thing nearly took George and Milly's breath away.

"Write to my uncle?" "Address the Baronet?" burst from them simultaneously.

"Yes, my children, I shall make one more advance before I die," said Mrs.

Johnstone firmly; and her children understood that though it might be the last, it had not been the first effort at reconciliation she had made.



CHAPTER V.

A SUDDEN DEATH, AND OTHER SUDDEN CHANGES.

GEORGE LOGAN elected to remain at Ardentiny till a reply to Mrs. Johnstone's letter to her brother arrived, or at least till time had been given for such an event. For it was by no means certain, as had been the case before, but that a dignified silence would be all the answer vouchsafed. In the meantime he wrote his happy news to his parents, and though the quiver at the

Manse was already pretty full, room was made in their hearts for this latest addition at once.

Old Mrs. Macdonald was most perplexed. Her son had written to her, with but scant explanation, that she would require to move out of Ardentiny House at the first term, and (for he had no idea of introducing the old woman to his English home) advising her to arrange for returning to her relatives in Glasgow. But though "Glesga" had been "*un chateau en Espagne*" at a distance, now that it was really looming in her future, she had little relish for the prospect.

"Wait till you're turned out, is my advice," said her friend, Mr. Logan; "you know I am likely to know as soon as most

folks if we require you to flit, and I'll give you timely notice."

The poor old woman, helpless, and apparently deserted by her only son, was truly grateful; for she and the family at the Lodge, and the one or two humble neighbours around, had been so much thrown together by the isolation of their lives, that she had come to look upon herself as belonging more to the Ramsey family than to any other. Besides, the aged rarely move the bounds of their habitation unless compelled by dire necessity, and then it is often like sucking their very heart's blood.

Some days had elapsed since Mrs. Johnstone wrote to her brother, and no answer had been received, and the hope of a reply,

which had at first been strong, was gradually dying out as post after post arrived without result. But though pen and paper failed the longing hearts yearning for sympathy from their nearest and dearest, the electric wires flashed a message from Melicent to George.

“Come at once,” it ran, “and bring Mrs. Johnstone with you ; her brother is dangerously ill.”

George drove straight over to the Lodge.

“What is it, George?” cried Milly, rushing out to meet him, for he had leapt right over the low garden wall from his seat on the drag, in his haste.

“I’m to take you and your mother off to Otterburn at once,” he replied, supplying

the blank which might or might not have been intended ; "there's a telegram this morning, and there's to be no delay."

"Oh, happy day !" cried Milly ; "I shall see the Hall, and my uncle, and my aunt at last." And George could not bear to tell her of the sad summons, and determined to let them make the journey, or at least most part of it, in blessed ignorance.

Mrs. Johnstone seemed scarcely less pleased than her daughter, and at once set about a few hurried preparations ; and never asked the reason why. Probably knowing her brother's imperious temperament, she felt no surprise at the hasty summons.

"How good of him to give in at last," she said, "and so kind just to send off at once for us. Perhaps it is my sister's

doing ; if so, I shall ever bless her for it. She will be like a daughter to me when I lose my own," with a happy little smile to Milly.

The usually grave, reserved woman seemed as if a load had been lifted off her heart, and as if she could not picture to herself enough of happiness out of this new found joy.

George had telegraphed of their coming, and the Otterburn carriage was awaiting them at the station, besides which, Mr. and Mrs. Logan had driven down to meet and receive them ; so it was into the arms of her new mother that Milly stepped. George's fair *affiance* was the little woman's special property, and as he witnessed the effusive meeting, he was

glad that he had kept his own counsel, and that no cloud of sorrow overhung his sweet bride, as with shy, happy glances she assumed her new position in his parents' hearts.

"How is Sir David?" he said aside to his father.

"Living, but that is all," was the reply.

"Will you take Mrs. Johnstone into the waiting-room for a minute, father, and tell her," asked George. "They neither of them know of his illness yet."

Mr. Logan gave Mrs. Johnstone his arm, and escorting her into the station, gently broke the sad news to her.

"It is an apoplectic seizure," he explained. "He suddenly left off speaking yesterday in the middle of a sentence, and

put up his hand to his head. They carried him to bed, and he has never rallied, but, on the contrary, seems gradually sinking."

"Alas!" she cried, "that I should come home after twenty years and find him thus," and then they joined the party on the platform.

"George," said his future mother-in-law, "will you take Milly down to the Manse, and get her some tea, and," turning to Mrs. Logan, "may I trespass on your kindness to put her up for the night? My brother is ill—dying, Mr. Logan tells me—and I wish to go and meet my sister alone. You will come up in the morning, love," she said to Milly as she bade her adieu, "and see how we do."

The arrangement suited all parties; Milly was driven off in the Manse waggonette, while Mrs. Johnstone stepped into the Hall brougham, and returned to her old home.

Naturally, the meeting between the sisters was somewhat constrained. Neither was demonstrative by nature, and almost strangers to each other besides; and Melicent's state of health and spirits had deprived her manners of their usual *esprit*. But the bonds of a common sorrow drew them together, and every moment wrought improvement on a coming face to face that had at first been cold enough.

Melicent soon felt the comfort of having some one to advise with and look up to in this trying crisis, and it struck every one

from the first that in some mysterious way, and certainly as if to the "manner born," Mrs. Johnstone assumed the elder sister-ship; and even in the few days that elapsed between her arrival and the moment Sir David breathed his last, Wright and the rest of the servants found themselves taking orders from the strange lady as naturally as if she had never been out of her father's house.

Next day Milly came up with George and made the acquaintance of her aunt (with what more than common interest they took their first look of each other!), and stole shy, uncomfortable glances, after the manner of young folks unused to sick beds, at the unconscious invalid; but she remained mostly at the Manse. Mrs.

Logan had quite taken possession of her, and besides, Mrs. Johnstone rather dreaded the present atmosphere of the Hall for her sensitive child.

Thus the sisters had much leisure for confidential communication, as they sat secluded, awaiting the solemn moment when the sufferer, already dead to everything around him, should yield up the laboured breathing by which alone life was proclaimed.

“He only spoke one word after we laid him down,” said Melicent, “and it was ‘Agnes.’ He had been talking of you,” (Melicent kindly withheld the information that she had been, apparently vainly, urging the Baronet to invite his long estranged sister to the Hall) “and I asked him,” she

went on, "should we send for you ; but I think he did not even hear me, for he made no attempt to reply."

"Poor David!" said Mrs. Johnstone; "we were children together ; but even as a boy he was tyrannical and overbearing, though he is lying low enough now."

And then they cried a little, as was natural, at the sad contrast ; and presently they dried their eyes, and Mrs. Johnstone told her sister of the engagement between George and Milly, and how highly she thought of her future son-in-law ; a channel of conversation which inevitably led up to the individual who had withdrawn from that position ; and as trust begets trust, Melicent told her sister all her own unhappy story, though the telling of it brought back the

dreaded palpitation, and she finished it breathless, in her sister's arms.

"My love," said that lady, soothingly, when she had somewhat recovered from the shock of first hearing to what fatal length Melicent's weakness and credulity had led her; "my love, we must find some way of delivering you out of the hands of that unscrupulous man, for I presume you are quite disenchanted of your delusion——?"

"Disenchanted!" cried Melicent; "Agnes if you'll believe me, were I possessed of Otterburn and Ardentiny at this moment, I would cheerfully resign them both, that I were free of him, and never see him again."

"I dare to say that something less than that will buy your freedom," said Mrs.

Johnstone, "though doubtless it will only be a golden key that will unlock your prison doors."

"There is no doubt of that," said Melicent. "Do you know, I fancy he is just waiting till my brother's death, to see what I am worth; he used often to speak of that time, but I was blinded then. Oh, will there be any deliverance for me on this side the grave?"

"Do not despair, dear," said her sister, with true sympathy; "you say George knows, and we will, if needful, take Mr. Gosford into our confidence, and buy this mercenary gentleman off, though it should be with half of the kingdom," and the hopeful words sent a thrill of returning confidence to Melicent's desponding heart,

such as she had not felt for many a day.

“How I wish I had had you,” she said, forgetting that she had never made the slightest attempt to do so, as long as the world went well with her, “how I wish I had had you for a comforter and counsellor long ago !”

“I have been sent at your need, Melicent,” gravely replied her sister ; “thank God that I was able and willing to come just when you most wanted me. I have had my day of pride and hardness, too ; but He—the merciful Father—leads the blind by a way that they know not. Solitude and affliction are stern, but salutary school-masters.”

Sir David Ramsey just lived, if living it could be called that was only dying, four

days after Mrs. Johnstone's arrival; and the last faint breath was drawn so gently, that the two sisters, who alone stood by his bedside, scarcely knew when the "silver cord" was loosed.

"It has been a peaceful end," said Mrs. Johnstone. "God grant that his soul may be at rest as well!" she added, with that, to many, uncontrollable desire to follow with prayers into that land where prayer is alike unneeded and unavailing, those for whom it has been a habit to approach the Throne, forgetting, or unable, to realize the stern truth that as the tree falls, so it must lie, and that though the prayer of faith may save the sick, it cannot alter the final doom of the parted spirit, who has already entered on an eternity of bliss or woe.

Consequent on the solemn event came the usual customs observed on such occasions. The blinds were pulled down, and the hatchment put up, and all the exterior symbols of woe were largely gone into ; for when the head of a great house like the Ramseys is taken away, it behoves the survivors, if they cannot "mourn and weep," at least to "make ado."

The sisters of the departed became invisible to ordinary mortals, only such privileged, because necessary, adjuncts as maids and dressmakers being admitted within the privacy to which they had retired ; and poor Milly came up from the Manse to make her first acquaintance with conventional grief.

Mr. George Logan, in his capacity of

factor, was supposed to be dividing his time between giving and receiving orders concerning the important day on which the last of the Ramseys was to be carried, in all the state he so dearly loved while living, to that common home of the race "where small and great partake the same repose." And so successfully did he carry out this mission, that the deeply gratified villagers of Otterburn, whose sense of dignity and self-respect was much affected by the doings at the Hall, declared with one consent that "this was the bravest burial the countryside had seen since auld Leddy Ramsey, the corpse's mither, gaed down the toun wi' her faither's crowner on the hearse, and the yearl's coach-an'-four ahint her."



CHAPTER VI.

A HACKNEYED SCENE.

POETS have painted it, painters have poetised it, and nearly every one who has "seen life" at all has assisted at "a reading of a will"—that most solemn, yet most grotesque, of all the chequered scenes that weak humanity enacts over the scarcely closed grave. "There is only a step," says some weaver of imagery, "there is only a step between the ridiculous and the sublime." Here they stand side by side without so

much as a step between ; on this the silent dead, so lately disenthralled from the sordid cares of earth, on, that the living, eager to take up the trammels of the scarcely cold clay, with a fine disregard of either their uncertain tenure, at that moment so eloquently set forth, or of their unknown responsibilities.

More momentous than most would the reading of Sir David Ramsey's will be. The estates were vast, giving to their possessor an influential position and much wealth ; and of the two sisters it was morally certain that one or both would succeed him in the fair lands of Otterburn and Ardentiny. A circumstance to both, or either of them, how significant ! To Mrs. Johnstone it would mean a restoration to

fortune and its corresponding rank—earthly honours from which she had been long debarred; to Melicent, on the contrary, it could only bring embarrassment and degradation, if thereby the man she had taken as her husband should be induced to urge his claim, and drag her from her position as Miss Ramsey of Otterburn to his own status as her late brother's factor—degradation not only of position, but of mind; for what else could it be, to own so close an alliance with one now despised where he had formerly been honoured, and for whom her blind love was turned to bitter hate?

Mr. Gosford was understood to be the custodian of the interesting documents, but it would have been highly indecorous

even to have alluded to such a matter openly till after the funeral banquet—so essentially, in Northern Britain at least, one of the rites of sepulture—had been partaken of. For the discussion of this solemn feast, the lawyer, the two sisters, Milly, Mr. and Mrs. Logan and their two sons, gathered round the table in grave array; and for a time the stately sirloin, the lordly ham, and solid baked meats, significant of the serious and awe-inspiring nature of the occasion, engaged, apparently, all their attention. Milly, indeed, who was new to the work, and whose susceptibilities had not been blunted by use, like the rest, felt that every mouthful was choking her, and could scarcely conceal her astonishment, almost amounting to disgust, that George—

her own kind-hearted, sympathetic George —could go in so largely for cold beef, after the unappetising work in which he had been engaged. Mr. Gosford, of course, was different, and of Mr. Logan, too, she did not look for such great things, while poor Davy was made no account of at all; but that George could be so heartless gave Milly quite a turn, and it was a manifest relief to her, and perhaps to them all, when Mr. Gosford rose, and bowing to Mrs. Johnstone, announced in portentous tones “that he had the testamentary documents of the late Baronet in his possession, and would they all be pleased to adjourn with him to the library, while he made known their contents.”

“We have just,” he added, “the parties

I should desire to be present," at which little Mrs. Logan's heart gave an almost audible bump against her side; but as a general move took place just then, and as other hearts were beating as well as hers, she had good reason to hope that no one had noticed her.

Mrs. Johnstone and Melicent led the way, and naturally seated themselves together at the head of the room. Mrs. Logan and Milly followed, and feeling that they were not so deeply interested, modestly withdrew to the further end of the apartment, while Mr. Logan and his two sons hung about in an irresolute, helpless sort of way, as if they did not feel certain that the result would justify their being there at all.

Mr. Gosford was an elderly gentleman of

spotless exterior and bland manners ; a *beau idéal* family lawyer, and safe repository for family secrets he looked, as he adjusted his spectacles and cleaned his throat, meanwhile untying quite a bundle of official looking papers.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he began, “allow me to preface the reading of these by a few explanatory remarks. In the year of grace —— I was honoured by the deceased Baronet’s commands to prepare a disposition of his extensive estates.” (Mrs. Johnstone noticed that it was the year of her marriage, and augured to herself no good.) “I executed that commission to the satisfaction of my esteemed employer, and for twenty years or more no changes were made. But after that date Sir David

wished some additions and alterations, as to legacies, etc., and I recommended a codicil to be appended to the original document, as the best means of carrying out his views. The plan was adopted, and till within the last six months, the will with its important codicil remained in force. Then my client became dissatisfied with the whole terms of his disposition. Certain family matters, he hinted to me, had come to his knowledge, which, if confirmed, would oblige him entirely to re-model the original settlement, but he wanted time for consideration and elucidation." (Here Melicent's breath came and went in sharp spasmodic jerks; she felt as if she were about to be put on her oath, and sworn to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," but

no such thing happened to her ; Mr. Gosford simply went on)—“ In spite of my advice to the contrary, Sir David Ramsey, in his own peremptory way, there and then executed a deed revoking and annulling all the former settlements, and leaving the disposal of his property to a document hereafter to be prepared.

“ This second paper was never even commenced. Either inadvertently or of design—I was never very certain which—he seemed in no hurry even to give orders for its preparation. ‘ Time enough ! time enough, Gosford !’ he would say, when I rather urged him to the completion of his purpose. ‘ Time enough, my good sir ; it can never be far wrong when the heir-at-law comes in.’ And this,

ladies and gentlemen, will be the result.

“ I will, with your permission,” continued Mr. Gosford, after a short pause, “ read the original will and codicil ; not that they are of any use now, but those interested may see the working of the late Sir David’s mind at different times, as, though, my dear madam,” addressing himself pointedly to Mrs. Johnstone, much to that lady’s surprise, “ we cannot precisely determine what the Baronet’s intentions were latterly, these papers will at least serve to indicate the views he once entertained.”

But we will not ask our readers to follow Mr. Gosford through all the “ aforesaid’s ” and “ these presents,” and other technical and mystical terms which, before he was

half-way through, landed Milly in a sea of bewilderment, and the other ladies little the wiser, but state briefly in unprofessional language the gist of the whole matter.

As Mrs. Johnstone surmised, Sir David had made his first will in the bitterness of his feelings towards her when she made her choice between humble, happy love and cold, unsatisfying splendour. All was then bequeathed unconditionally to Melicent—Otterburn and Ardentiny and “all goods, gear, etc., moveable or otherwise, of which I may die possessed.”

Mrs. Johnstone’s heart sank within her as she listened, for Mr. Gosford’s preliminary explanations had been all thrown away upon his hearers, and it never struck

her or any of them that she was the heir-at-law of which he spoke. What a chance had slipped away from Andrew Macdonald, had he played his cards and kept his secret better.

Presently they came to the codicil.

“And I appoint my said executors to pay within twelve months of my decease, first, to my trusted friend and factor Andrew Macdonald, the sum of five thousand pounds sterling. To the Rev. John Logan, minister of the parish of Otterburn, the sum of five hundred pounds sterling. To David Ramsey Logan, son of the afore-said Rev. John Logan, the sum of five hundred pounds sterling.” Sums varying in amount were next devised to servants and old retainers of the house, and then

followed : " And I commend Mrs. Agnes Ramsey or Johnstone, widow of the late William Johnstone in Otterburn, to the care of my sister, Melicent Logan Ramsey."

" Then," said Mr. Gosford, taking up the next deed, " this is simply revoking and annulling all previous documents ; and it is just virtually, though not practically, as if the deceased Baronet had died intestate, for the heir-at-law will now step in, and make up a title on the revocation, and the effect of it (in my opinion, though perhaps others might hold differently, and a plea might be raised)," put in Mr. Gosford parenthetically, " the effect of it is just to give Mrs. Johnstone full and unconditional possession of all property, both

moveable and heritable, belonging to her late brother."

"Thank God for that!" cried Melicent before any one could speak.

Mrs. Johnstone laid a warning hand on her sister's shoulder.

"We thank you, my dear sir," she said to Mr. Gosford, "for your friendly services. My sister and I will confer together on this most unexpected—at least to me—and much unwished-for conclusion; but whatever the result of our deliberations, I hope I need scarcely say it will not be a law-plea. Now, gentlemen, perhaps you would prefer returning to the dining-room for a little. Wright, I am sure, will attend to your present wants; and by-and-bye Miss Ramsey will, I am not afraid to

say, give you some tea in the drawing-room."

And the gentlemen did not require a second hint, but "skedaddled," as George said, in an aside to David, "at once."



CHAPTER VII.

CHANGE OF AIR, AND CHANGE TO THE HEIRESS.

MRS. JOHNSTONE took all beholders by surprise at the ease and stateliness with which she fell into her new position, for, as she had said to Mr. Gosford, no law-plea sprang out of the uncertainty of Sir David's mind—as evidenced by his will, or rather want of will—in his latter days.

“It could not have been better,” Melicent said, “not if I had made it myself;”

and the once proud, imperious woman now hung about her sister in a humble, dependent way, and seemed to prefer it.

“You’ll put things all right for me, I know, Agnes,” she said, and Mrs. Johnstone had replied that she should be ashamed to accept the trust on any other proviso. “You are my second daughter, you know,” she added, “and will likely be an only child again soon ; for Milly seems already to be one of the Logans. Only fancy ! the dear child was hoping yesterday that I would pay Mr. Logan and David their legacies ; but she did not ask for anything for George or herself. Do you know, Melicent, I have been thinking that we should just go by the codicil, excepting for the first legacy of five thousand—I

should say it was fairly forfeited, as the legatee cannot now be called either trusted or faithful."

"Why, Agnes, I should think that was what they call legal acumen," said Melicent, with a faint attempt at a smile, a facial indicator now highly valued, because so seldom seen. "In all other respects," she continued, "the codicil will be such a very good guide, and the people will feel as if they were getting their rights, don't you think?"

"Then, love, we will just abide by it," chimed in Mrs. Johnstone, "for the Logans and Wright, and the rest of them; and in the meantime, we will (as Milly's future mother-in-law would say) 'let the sleeping dog lie;' when it wakes up, as no

doubt it some day will, we must throw it a bone for the sake of peace."

It was thus they had come to speak of the once "trusted and faithful," the obliging neighbour, the useful male friend to whom Mrs. Johnstone had always resorted in her troubles, the upright, prosperous man whose alliance with her daughter she would not positively forbid, bound yet closer to Melicent by the nearest, but never now to be the dearest, of ties—and they spoke of him as a dog! For the elder lady's figure was not all hyperbole—the epithet in its fulness dishonoured the brute more than it belied the man. A "dumb dog," too, he was for the present, but they were perfectly aware that when it pleased him he could both bark and bite.

In due course, Mr. Gosford was, as he himself would have said, honoured by Mrs. Johnstone's instructions to wind up her brother's affairs, as had been agreed upon between herself and Melicent; and after a couple of months she proposed that they should all go to Ardentiny for a while.

"I wish to show you my Highland home, Melicent," she said. "It will be a poor place to you, after Otterburn; but I think you will put up with it for my sake, and the change will do us all good."

Mrs. Johnstone had another end in view; she did not wish to allow Melicent to feel that she was parting with Otterburn as a home for ever. But George Logan had been pleading, and Milly had been second-

ing him by an eloquent silence, for an early experience of matrimonial felicity.

“I’ll be taking to fishing again,” threatened George. “I feel it breaking out all over me; and as it’s close time, the water bailiffs will be down on the tenderest spot in Milly’s heart. They’re a rough lot, and I wouldn’t advise it.”

His intended mother-in-law understood and trusted George fully now, and saw no reason why the young lovers should be kept waiting, with their bright anticipations hanging over them—a state of suspense they seemed [to find very hard to bear. Having therefore arranged, with the help of Mr. Gosford—for it was a subject she felt a delicacy in airing to her sister—to settle Otterburn on them as her daughter’s

marriage portion, while she kept Ardentiny for her own requirements and Melicent's, so she also planned by a ruse to get that lady away from her old home—detached mentally and bodily from her life-long surroundings—trusting that material influences would be useful aids in the formation of fresh associations, though the process at her time of life might be somewhat tedious.

The three ladies, attended by Wright and Foster, went straight to the Lodge, while George Logan, who considered he had a vested right in old Mrs. Macdonald and Ardentiny House, took up his quarters there, under pretence of overlooking and inspecting the grand overhauling and general repair going on within the dilapi-

dated old mansion, with the view of making it a fitting habitation for Mrs. Johnstone in her new character as lady of the Manor. By-and-bye, she and Melicent would take up their abode there, with servants and horses, and all the adjuncts of aristocratic life becoming their wealth and position.

It would be hard to say whether mother or daughter most enjoyed the return to the old home, with its simple but always elegant habits; and even Melicent was charmed by the novelty of a life that seemed to her a veritable Arcadia. Milly's cows and poultry, and even the shaggy pony grazing on the hillside, became sources of interest to the listless, weary woman, who, like Solomon, had put to the test all the pleasures of earth, and like him

had found them but "vanity and vexation of spirit."

"It's doing Aunt Melicent no end of good, being here, mother," said Milly, one day; "I wish you would just consent to remain till after——" pausing and blushing.

"And have your marriage in this poor little place, Milly?" said her mother; "I doubt it is impossible, and scarcely fitting for the heiress of Otterburn."

"Oh, pray, mother! don't speak so of our dear old home," cried Milly, with pleading tone and look; only a short year ago, when all her affections were centred round Ardentiny House and its faithless master, the Lodge was a dreary place to Milly. But these changes of feeling come to young people, and they make them in a reckless

off-hand way, as if the doing so involved no inconsistency, or evinced no instability of mind. "You know, mother," continued Milly, "it's the only house we can really call our own, and where poor papa lived and died, and where I was born, and all that; and George thinks, as there is only to be a very quiet party, it would be very jolly to have it here."

"Ah, well!" said Mrs. Johnstone, smiling; "if George and you are both agreed, it will be in vain to oppose it. But what will Wright and Foster say? they are already grumbling, I hear, at being compelled to stay in this 'hampered, out-of-the-way place,' as they call it, and if they have a wedding party to provide for, I fear they will lose their heads entirely."

“George says neither of them have any head to lose, so that won’t make much difference,” said Milly, laughing; “but leave them to me, mother. I have given them both so many shocks already, by the display of my various Highland accomplishments, that I expect they will be pliable enough to take on any impression I choose by the end of August.”

So Milly, as usual, had her way, and if she had not, George would have had his. Therefore Mrs. Johnstone resigned herself to the inevitable; and as May was now pretty well advanced, Aunt Melicent and her maid Foster began to bestir themselves about that most interesting of all feminine gear, the *trousseau*; and sundry expeditions to Edinburgh, and arrivals and

departures of various kinds, enlivened the glen, and kept its few inhabitants in a state of commotion unknown within the memory of the "oldest."

Mr. Gosford, too, sometimes accompanied by a clerk, came and went after a fashion that would have driven Mr. Macdonald frantic had he been there to see.

The result of these professional visits was that Otterburn was settled unconditionally on the young couple, while Ardentiny was to be burdened to half its value, and paid annually "to my sister, Melicent Logan Ramsey, should she survive me, always and so long as she remains unmarried." The old lawyer was much puzzled by this clause, and ventured

to ask if Miss Ramsey would have nothing in the very probable event of her marriage ?

“It is by my sister’s wish,” replied Mrs. Johnstone, and Mr. Gosford understood that it was some whim of the young lady’s that she would not be sought for her money. He little knew what potent reason she had for her apparent caprice.

Meanwhile the restoration of Ardentiny House went on apace—“taken down in the old and put up in the new,” Mrs. Logan explained to her friends, while her son George declared that what with swallowing any amount of old plaster, as it crumbled down in impalpable dust, and taking on a succession of coats of fresh as

it dropped from the trowels of the artists, Milly's bridegroom was becoming as nearly assimilated as possible to one of the handsome white figures the dark-eyed sons of the sunny South bear aloft on their well-poised heads.

"You may congratulate yourself, Milly," he added, "that you had a good frame-work to begin upon. You know you never could have made Macdonald handsome, with all the stucco at Ardentiny."

George never tired of reminding his betrothed, after his own fashion, of the advantageous change that time had wrought in her prospects, probably much incited to it by her mother's amused smiles and Davie's honest attempts to protect his future sister from the badinage of her

futur. David had come to spend the college recess at Ardentiny, in answer to a piteous complaint from his brother "that while Milly had dozens of people attending to her *trousseau*, no one ever gave a thought to his;" and the fair bride, never having had a brother of her own, abandoned herself to the novelty of the prospective possession, and the two had got up quite a fast friendship, "deferring to each other," said George, "in a way that made it impossible to say how they ever could have settled anything had they got to spend their lives together. It's a pity, but you could ask Macdonald to come and do 'afflicted parient,' Milly," he went on, "or that the Reverend David, that is to be, could have tied the fatal knot.

Papa will have to be both priest and *pater*. I declare! I never knew so friendless a young person. But don't cry, love," as Milly smiled up in his face; "there's no end of young Logans rising up for your protection, to say nothing of others looming in the future."

"I thought they were to be Logan-Ramseys," said sly Davie, which remark brought about a brotherly passage at arms, and David had to sue for peace and pardon.

"By the way, Milly," rattled on this incorrigible joker, "I hear you are to have two mothers-in-law at your wedding—the one that was to have been, as well as the other happier she that is to be. Old Mrs. Macdonald applied to me yesterday

in her distress. It seems, like other young ladies when asked out, she has 'nothing to wear.' 'Fairly oot o' sic toggery as waddin' braws,' as she put it, and would I just write down to 'Glesga' to a friend, who would supply the needful, 'for ma wee faavrite owre bye wull tak' nae exkoose."

"To be sure, George! You don't think I could be happy and my old friend not here?" said Milly; and though she intended it for a very hard nut for George to crack, it was quite true, all the same, that Milly's loving little heart could devise no better mode of solacing old Mrs. Macdonald for the loss she was about to sustain, than by asking her to come and witness its consummation.

Sorely perplexed and puzzled was the old lady by the change of bridegroom.

“Hoo it comes,” she said, “to be that daft callant instead o’ my son Andrew is what I canna make out at a’; but sin’ he’s desairted me, belike he’s dune the same wi’ her, and folk maun just tak’ them as wants them. Hech, sirs! after a’s said and dune, the young chap is maybe just as like her.”

This was to Melicent, who had brought herself to be kind to the old woman from a romantic feeling of the unknown relationship that subsisted between them, all the while her fastidious soul abhorring the contact, and drawing parallels between the old lady’s style and tone and Andrew at his worst. “With such a mother, what

could one expect?" she asked herself. But Milly knew better. "If Donald," she still thought of him by the old loved name, "if Donald had been like his mother, things would all have been different."

Two other guests Milly Johnstone asked to her bridal. Hearing that she had two aunts living at Otterburn, she wrote to them a kindly loving letter. "Would they take the trouble of coming, that she might have some of her father's kindred about her on that important day?" The request so put could not well be refused, and they came—sweet, fair, dainty women, Nature's finest handiwork, owing little or nothing to artificial culture—such women as their brother had been a man; and it was only to look from them to the fair

bride to see that she did not owe all her loveliness to the aristocratic side of the house.

Next came Mrs. Logan, with quite a troop of youngsters. George's wedding was far too important an occasion to be passed over unnoticed by even the most infantile member of the Manse nursery, and great had been the preparations for the event, and highly satisfactory the result, though none but the energetic managing mother knew how she had "risen betimes, and late from rest had kept," that the children, whom she would not disappoint by keeping at home, might do no discredit to George.

With such a party gathered together, not for pomp, or parade, or the richness of

their wedding gifts, but for the wealth of their love, and the fragrance of their kindly affections, gathered just as Milly culled her flowers—not for their gorgeous colouring, but for the sweetness of their perfume—how could the bridal be aught but blythe ? And merry as a marriage bell it was ; the bride, in her innocent happiness, caring not to conceal it, and the bridegroom amusing all beholders by the unusual sobriety of his air, and the utter failure he made in attempting to reply to the toast of the day. What though Wright and Foster missed many of the appliances custom had taught them to consider indispensable ? What though the champagne had to be imbibed from tumblers ?—those of the guests who were not making their first acquaintance

with it never enjoyed it more, and old Mrs. Macdonald, after a hearty swill, put down her glass with a sigh of intense satisfaction, and a "Hech sirs! but it's fine;" then, turning to her next neighbour—of all the others, Melicent—remarked to that highly refined and fastidious maiden, with a confidential nod, combining at once the interrogative and affirmative, "That will be Edinburgh ale, noo?"—and Melicent, speechless with horror and astonishment, permitted the unfortunate questioner to live and die in her delusion.



CHAPTER VIII.

REVENONS À NOS MOUTONS.

ALL this while our factor remained lost—not to the world in general, such prominent talents as his could not be altogether eclipsed—but to that portion of it comprising his old familiars and friends.

Even his mother never heard from him. “She can neither read nor write,” he said to himself, “and it does not suit my book, at present, that any of them should do so for her.” He had entered on the manage-

ment of a large estate in Norfolk, and was astonishing the burly, jovial farmers, as much by his leanness of body as by his pronouncedness of spirit.

"He keaps hissen doon wi't," they remarked to each other *à propos* of their new neighbour; "Mon, vall tew! vall tew! an' get summat to yeat," they cried to him at the club dinners, in reply to his eloquence. "A mon caan't loive on taalk. Drink up thy yaale, an' thou'll coost a toitherwise shaadder i Upperby waast i' the munloight."

Here was a vocation for Andrew, not to improve his shadow, as they advised him, but to educate the community among whom his lot was cast out of a dependence on mere brute force, and a lamentable trust in

"yeating an' droinking," to a belief in himself, and a consequent willingness to listen to him.

They did get the length of listening to him for a couple of weeks or so.

"He's nobbut an owd woife," they said, "an' knows nowt aboot varming;" and as they had long leases, and their rents in their pockets, they let him take the "taalk" for his share, and applied themselves with greater zeal than ever to the yaale and the beef. Just when he was in danger, for the first time in his life, of being driven to despair, the news of Sir David Ramsey's death reached him.

"It's coming to a crisis now," he thought; "it's Melicent and thousands, or I'll know what my secret is worth."

He waited a few weeks, and then he appeared suddenly one morning in Mr. Gosford's office.

"You're a stranger hereabouts," remarked that gentleman in his ignorance; "I expected to see you at the funeral."

"I couldn't get down at the time," replied Andrew; "how did the old fellow cut up?" he asked, in as off-hand a tone as he could assume.

"He couldn't be said to cut up at all," replied the lawyer; "he didn't actually die intestate; but for the heirship it came to much the same thing. I say! what a chance you've lost!" continued Mr. Gosford, who did not much affect Macdonald; "there was five thousand left to you at one time, but that and everything else was cancelled

by the last deed ; and now all goes of course to Mrs. Johnstone—lock, stock, and barrel.”

“ All ! ” echoed Macdonald, attempting a composure which did not impose on the astute old lawyer. “ All ! Ardentiny, and Otterburn, and all ; and that girl of hers will get every penny of it. Good Lord ! ” he cried, “ you don’t say so ? ”

“ I don’t only say it, I know it,” rejoined Mr. Gosford, enjoying the scene, though little guessing all its breadth. ‘ Miss Johnstone will get it all eventually, no doubt ; in the meantime, George Logan gets her and Otterburn in hand, and Ardentiny in prospect ; but that is not *ex officio*—the settlements are not drawn out yet, though no doubt that is what is intended.”

Andrew did not swear ; he retained his presence of mind sufficiently to remember that it would be an unwarrantable proceeding under the circumstances. But if ever a volley of oaths were let off *sotto voce* then was the time ; and Luck, and Chance, and Fortune, the Gods he had hitherto worshipped, were cursed in curses not loud, but deep. Mr. Gosford stood and surveyed him, as the demon in his heart became photographed on his face.

“ I never,” said the old lawyer to his junior, afterwards, “ I never saw a man take on so for a paltry five thousand ; at the last he looked more like a fiend than a human being, and such a passionless, expressionless face he carries about for everyday wear ! I tell you, I felt somewhat

relieved when he turned round with a prolonged sound, between a groan and a whistle, and took himself off. And all for filthy lucre, too," added Mr. Gosford, with a quiet chuckle; "I see the love of it is not confined to our profession. I am glad I had thought to tell him of his forfeited legacy. It is just as well to take a man's measure when you get the chance."

Mr. Macdonald left Mr. Gosford's office in a state of mind difficult to describe. He had taken his aim and missed his mark, and, most irritating reflection of all, there had been so little between him and the prize.

When a man has believed in nothing but himself, he must naturally feel that he has been the architect of his own misfortunes ;

and the glorious consolation of some one to blame must be partially denied him. But our hero was too unscrupulous a gentleman not to be able to pitch upon a scapegoat ; and without a thought of tenderness for the woman he had professed to love, and whose love for him had cost her so dear, he cursed her, and the unoffending girl who had been so true to him. But all that availed him nothing, save to open the door of his heart for the entrance of other spirits more wicked than the first, till the name of them might well be called "legion." What he did next was more to the purpose. Back to Norfolk he needs must go ; but he turned aside by the way to see what had become of the old priest at Gretna and his book of

registers. He was more fortunate in his quest than George Logan had been, for he found the sharp old man gathered to his fathers, and his wife—a dull stolid woman, without an idea in her head beyond cash in hand—custodian of the precious volume. For a ten-pound note, though her visitor would gladly have given ten times the amount, she tore out the coveted leaf, and gave it to him, including the wafers by which George and her dead husband had tried to seal up Melicent's unhappy secret. Andrew's quick eye caught them, and he made inquiries.

“It was the other side,” she explained in her heavy, listless way; “they came afore the gudeman dee'd, an' wanted the leaf”—she had evidently never asked why they

did not get it— “and someway they just wafered it up instead.”

Andrew understood it all.

“Your father was a fule man,” commented this intelligent critic to her daughters, after the visitor left ; “he wadna meddle wi’ the auld useless buke, but for my pairt, I wad sell every leaf that’s in’t for less than I got the day.”

So Andrew carried off the duplicate in triumph, if that condition of mind could be at all ascribed to him, after the stunning blow he had received.

“I’ll make some of them pay sweetly for it, yet,” he said to himself, which showed, at least, that he was returning to his normal state. But his evil genius had not done with him. Whether the unwonted

depression he laboured under led him to crave for some stimulant, or whether the recommendation of his Norfolk friends was having its weight with him, they began to perceive that their once abstemious neighbour was becoming as much devoted to the "yaale" as themselves. From ale he speedily went on to brandy, but not with the happy result they had predicted; for instead of his shadow growing broader, he was every day getting more shadowy, and his old enemy, the attacks that used to create such alarm at Otterburn and Ardentiny, returned with renewed force, and not one of all his former anxious friends to know or care whether he were sick or well.

In fact, the very day he was at the

worst, these heartless people were quaffing champagne to the health of the man who had supplanted him, and the girl who might have been his wife, all unconscious of the real pain the miserable sufferer was enduring—hardly any of them even knowing where he was, and some of them, at least, thinking of him only with loathing and contempt.

What a contrast to the last time he had been ill! Then Milly and his mother ministered to his wants, and Melicent's tender inquiries came daily to cheer and comfort him.

Now none but servants were about him, and even they were strangers, and alien to him in speech and customs, and heartily wished the peevish Scotchman back in his

own country. Then it came to him to experience that utter sense of loneliness and desertion, intensified by illness, which is about the lowest depth of woe a human being can fathom. When in health his spirit had sustained him, and the hope of revenge, that feeling so dear to the unrenewed heart, had solaced him. But with his sickness a change that was more helplessness than softening came. He began to feel that he had made himself a pariah to his only friends ; and gradually the wish—as for the present he had lost the power—to injure them died out, and in its place, out of the egotism that still possessed him, sprung up a longing for love and companionship.

Naturally his heart went out to Meli-

cent. When a man can legally call a woman his wife, he feels that he has a proprietary in her and a sovereignty over her which, even without any more elevating sentiment, gives her an exceptional interest in his eyes. Though neither passion nor affection should sway his heart, yet he cannot be wholly indifferent to her, because she is his own—his to love or his to hate; his to cherish according to the warmth of his affections, or his to treat with that cold and passive endurance which to many women is worse than kicks and blows, yet always his. So Andrew Macdonald, lying helpless and solitary, began to wake up to the notion that Melicent was his own, and that therefore she should come to him. In common

with the untutored savage, who takes unto himself a squaw that she may carry his wood and draw his water, so this specimen of civilized humanity began to wish for his squaw by his bed of languishing, that she might lay her hand on his fevered brow, or hold the quenching beverage to his parched lips.

Before his illness, after he became aware of the fact of Mrs. Johnstone's succession to her brother's estates, he thought of Melicent only as a useless incubus, an expensive luxury that would not pay either for pleasure or profit. Now he thought of summoning her to take up her wifely duties ; but though he knew it was a point of law that a married woman cannot separate herself entirely from her husband, he

also knew that it was rarely or never insisted on, unless as a plea of defence in a suit for alimony, and that so long as Melicent made no claim for support, she was tolerably free to live how and where she pleased.

Again, on the other hand, he reflected that he could not appeal to the law without divulging his secret ; and once out, it was of no further commercial value, and he was not prepared to resign that *dernier ressort*, or deprive himself of making capital, if nothing more, from the dark transaction.

In spite of these prudential considerations, the sick man's wishes strengthened with his weakness. In imagination he overcame all obstacles, and removed every

stumbling-block. He dreamt of it while he slept, and thought of it when awake, till his whole soul seemed consumed by this one desire. He even pleased himself with the notion that if she would only come to him he would try to make her happy, and provide for her as near an approximation to her former mode of life as his income—and it was no mean one—would allow. But that he was never delirious, his attendants might have heard, to their surprise, that he had a wife in Scotland, whom day and night he called on.

Mr. Macdonald's attacks, understood by Mrs. Logan and others to be "his liver again," were always tedious. This one, with the sore, unquenchable longing on his mind, became unduly protracted. Weaker

and weaker he grew ; down and yet further down into the depths he sank ; but his stony heart was never melted—his stone-blind eyes were never opened to see the enormity of his conduct. Selfish he had always been—childish he became now. Tears, that repentance never drew from him, fell in abundance as he contemplated his sorrows ; and his soul sent forth piteous cries for help to the absent friends who would never hear them, or, if they did, might give no heed. Only to Him who would have heard and answered him he never turned. Sin was yet rampant within him, and he knew enough to know that it is only “when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right,”

that he can appeal to Him who trieth the reins and the heart.

It was months before he could get to Harrogate, and even then it was weeks ere he felt equal to going down to Scotland; for this was what he had fixed to do.

“It’s no use writing,” he thought. “Most likely the letter would be returned unopened! I know the kind of stuff she’s made of,” he sighed; “but if I could get a sight of her, maybe the old feelings would come back to her. ‘Cauld kail, they say, is easy het again.’”



CHAPTER IX.

SEEKING THE UNATTAINABLE.

IN due course, that is, so soon as his strength permitted, Andrew Macdonald went down to Tain, where he took up his quarters for a few days, from thence prospecting in the neighbourhood of Ardentiny House, with whose features he had grown strangely unfamiliar. He had numbers of old cronies in the market-town, from whose loquacity he managed to extract all needful information, without be-

traying his ignorance ; for it might have spoiled the game on hand to have acknowledged that he did not even know, till they told him, that his mother resided no longer at the " House," where he had left her, but had changed places with Mrs. Johnstone, and now lived at the Lodge ; and also that the wife he was more particularly in search of was, with her sister, occupying the " big house," which, to the Tain worthies, was now a very big house indeed, with a large establishment, which Mrs. Johnstone had set up more for her sister's gratification than her own.

And truly Melicent, unless she had been disposed to seek for consolation in higher things, stood much in need of all the solace earth could give her. For what with her

bad health and her ill fortune, and the harrowing dread of matters getting even worse with her, her sister was only too glad to find that material things still afforded her pleasure, to deny them to her. The moral atmosphere in which she had hitherto lived had always been of the earth, earthy, and she was not one to whom a sudden conversion would ever come. With her it would be a work of time—much putting off of the old man, much putting on of the new; some progress upward and onward; many slips, many falls; yet a growing meetness for better things. A gradual putting of the world under her feet now, when her Heavenly Father, in his purposes of mercy towards her, gave her to see and to feel

how all along she had been leaning on a broken reed. In her pilgrimage journey she had come into the wilderness, that she might "be allured." A guiding Hand was "leading" her, but as yet she saw it not. A gracious Teacher was "instructing" her, but she was slow to learn the lesson. And through it all she was kept as the apple of His eye, and her sister's guardianship was the human agency by which it was effected.

Still, with all the tenacity of long usage, she clung to her old delights—innocent pleasures that afforded the needed relaxation to both mind and body, and did no wrong either to herself or her fellow-creatures. So her horse was brought from Otterburn, and she took daily rides up the

glen and past the Lodge, to the delectation of old Mrs. Macdonald and Callum and "the twa lassies," who never failed to run to door or window to look at her ; for the lady they knew only as Miss Ramsey, mounted on her black thoroughbred, attired in a London hat and habit, and generally, but not always, an attendant following her, was altogether "an itherwise braw show," as Mrs. Macdonald said, to what little Milly had been on her mountain pony.

The old lady, who was getting to that time of life when "out of sight is out of mind," had partially forgotten her son, when that gentleman, under cover of darkness, suddenly appeared on the scene.

"Gude guide us tae, Andrew ! or is't a

ghaist?" she cried; for naturally Andrew was more angular and shadowy than ever, and his mother was at least as much surprised as pleased to see him—a reception that might have been somewhat disconcerting to him, had it not been that he was preoccupied with anxious forebodings as to the reception he might receive in another quarter. His mother's love might still have been his, but of that he made no account. From wishing for Melicent's companionship, and allowing his mind to dwell on her image, it had become enshrined in what the hardening influence of Mammon worship had left to him of a heart; and the semblance of a passion that had quickened his pulses during the first exciting days of their secret meetings came

back to him now, with an intensity that was consuming his vitals, and a sickening dread of failure that was all but death to him.

It all depended on the venture; and when and how was it to be made?

He got some tea from his mother, and then sauntered out. He had no fixed plan, but he found himself on the road that led to "the House"—that well-known road he had so often traversed with Milly. But now another image than hers accompanied him, another vision filled his mind's eye; and unconsciously quickening his steps, he never halted till the windows of Ardentiny House burst upon him in a blaze of light.

Less filled with one idea, he could not

have failed to notice the change. In former days a solitary window might have shown a glimmering light, and that would have been all. Now, corridor and gallery and entrance-hall threw their brilliant rays on the gloom of night, but could not permeate the soul of this unhappy wanderer, or even fill his heart with wonder. With an access of tenderness utterly out of keeping with his hard and worldly nature, he stretched out his hands to the unconscious pile, and murmured, "Melicent ! Melicent !" Then, neither expecting nor receiving any response, he turned on his heel and went slowly back, to throw himself once more on a sleepless pillow, and plan and project, and alternate between hope and fear, till the dawn of another

day broke on his restless spirit. And this was how Andrew Macdonald came back to the Highlands! How changed from former days, both the circumstances and himself! Then, panoplied in his pride, he feared no evil, dreaded no contretemps. Now, crushed in mind and body, he drifted helplessly along the stream of time; not, indeed, without attempting to use the rudder, but, for him, with wondrously little faith in his efforts, and very uncertain which shore would be the one to receive him.

Eagerly enough he sighed for the sunny-glowing landscape—Melicent's love and pardon; as earnestly he strove against the notion of the dark and shady side, the loveless, hopeless life to which he would

be doomed if she persisted in her just indignation. While worse still would be the going down in mid-stream into that dark, unknown land, so full of shadowy terrors to him who had lived only for the present world—a possible termination to his illness to which he could not altogether close his eyes.

That same evening, while the disowned husband was sending forth his imploring cry to the night winds that whistled round Ardentiny House, the wife who spurned him was filled with a most unaccountable disquiet.

“I can settle to nothing to-night, Agnes,” she said, as she got up and drew aside the curtain and peered out into the darkness.

Of course she saw nothing, and she

returned to the warmth of the fireside with a heavy sigh.

"To-morrow I must mount Zoe," she continued, "and have a canter up the glen."

"Yes, love," replied Mrs. Johnstone, "you always come back refreshed from your rides. In the meantime, shall we have a game at chess, *pour passer le temps*?"

"I think I should rather like it," replied Melicent, and presently the two sisters were deep in the moves of the interesting and engrossing game. They were both skilful players. It was a pastime that ran in the family, as these things often do, picked up by the children because they see their elders engaged in it, and so handed

down from father to son. It had been a great resource at Otterburn during Sir David's frequent seasons of convalescence, and equally Mrs. Johnstone and her daughter had beguiled many a long winter evening, travestying on the chequered board the vicissitudes of a more serious scene.

But to-night Melicent had lost her skill, or at least her power to apply it. Her knights made impossible leaps, and ungal-lantly settled themselves on squares where no true knight should have been. Her bishops forgot the consistent walk that became their character, and struck out for clandestine corners. Even the little pawns, scorning the conventional hop that alone belonged to them, and adding a skip

and a jump of their own, landed unexpectedly among the enemy's forces, to the embarrassment of both sides alike.

Mrs. Johnstone was in despair.

"What has come to you, dear?" she asked.

"Are you quite sure you don't feel ill?"

"Oh, not ill exactly," replied Melicent; "just a kind of all-overishness, don't you know. I dare say I shall be all right to-morrow—at least, after my ride."

On the morrow Macdonald came down to a late breakfast. His mother, her own matutinal meal long past, sat by the window, urging upon her son the food he could not take. Presently she said :

"There's Miss Ramsey awa' bye ; belike she'll be ca'ing as she comes doon. She aye does sae, for ordinar'."

The blood rushed all over her son's pale face.

"Then I'll take myself off," he said.
"She won't be calling to see me."

"Wi' ye needna fash yersel'," replied the old woman ; "she'll no' light doon the day —she hasna the man wi' her."

Andrew paid no attention to his mother's remonstrance, but took his hat and went out.

"Now or never," he said to himself.
"I could not have a better chance. She hasna the man wi' her, my mother said. She used to come to me on horseback. Will she come to me now?"

Ah, will she, false lover? Those were the days when she believed thee true.

Andrew crossed some fields that led to

the road higher up the glen. He knew that he had plenty of time to reach it ere the woman who was so firmly bound to him, yet so loosely held by him, could return. But, in his nervous haste, he actually ran.

He waited, chafing at the delay, every moment becoming more unequal to the task before him. Where was now the business coolness he had shown at their parting? Where now the almost indifference with which he had hurried his new-made wife away? Presently she came on at a sharp trot.

"Will she ride on—and take no notice of me?" he asked himself; and to prevent at least that *dénouement*, he stepped to the middle of the road.

Melicent merely noticed the obstruction, that was all ; for Zoe, a perfect creature in every other respect, had a bad habit of swerving in a long and sometimes dangerous sweep when any obstacle appeared to confront her, and her fair rider knew by experience that it was prudent in such cases to slacken speed. Yet, preoccupied with this weak point in Zoe's character, she never saw her other danger, but rode right into it, all unconscious, till Macdonald took the bridle in one hand, and held up the other to greet her.

Melicent never knew how she kept her seat, and her reason, and her coolness. But it was the suddenness of the whole thing partially stunning her that made her strength. He, who might have been pre-

pared for the meeting, if premeditation could have done it, had lost power of speech, and could only hold up an abject pleading face, and a beseeching suppliant hand, to the mistress of his destiny.

“What do you want?” said Melicent. “What is it you want?” feeling that it was useless addressing him in any conventional way, and proceeding to business at once. “Will you say what it is, and let me go?” for Andrew only stood gazing at her, and the hand she scorned to take he had let fall into her lap.

Melicent shuddered as he touched her.

“Oh! if Zoe would only shy now,” she thought.

But Andrew’s hand was firmly planted on Zoe’s bridle, and though he could not

tell her mistress what he wanted of her, he made it sufficiently plain to the fiery little mare.

“What do I want?” at last he gasped. “I want my wife. Qh! Melicent——”

And like a tired child seeking rest, he was about to lay his head, too, in her lap. But this was too much for the already exasperated lady. A smart touch with the whip on Zoe’s off-shoulder made the mettled steed bound from her detainer’s grasp, and Melicent, once free, wheeled round and faced her husband.

“You are seeking for what you will never find,” she said. “Though I cannot deny that hated name, it is only a name, and will never be anything more. Not

though you pled for ever on your bended knees. I told you once before that the word of a Ramsey is as good as their bond, and I tell you so again."

"Oh, Melicent!" he pled, "think of the past. Only have pity, and hear me!"

"It is because I think of the past that I will neither hear you nor see you, except as you may waylay me as you have done to day, false coward!" she hurled at him in the extremity of her indignation, and then she turned leisurely round and rode from his sight.

Soon she gave Zoe the rein, and that fretted and impetuous steed broke into a gallop that consorted well with the thwarted feelings of both horse and rider.

“Did ye see Miss Ramsey?” asked Andrew’s mother, when he came in from his unpropitious adventure. “She gaed by here like an arrow frae a bow.”



CHAPTER X.

BARTERED FOR GOLD.

IT is said that "the boy is the father of the man." Reasoning by analogy, the girl should be the mother of the woman. But as far as Mrs. Johnstone was concerned, this could not with any truth be predicated of the weaker sex. In her case, the girl had been helpless and doingless; the woman was ready in judgment and prompt in action. She had shown it not only in the upbringing of her own young daughter,

but was even showing it now in the care she took of her sister, and the way in which she shielded her from trouble and disgrace.

Early next morning, with carriage-blinds drawn, she took her to Tain, and saw her on to Otterburn, telegraphing to her son and daughter to meet and receive their aunt, returning herself in the same fashion, that none in the glen, whether resident or sojourner, might guess her errand. She had no sooner arrived at home, after her twenty miles drive, than she penned a brief note to Macdonald, requesting an interview with him at Ardentiny House, and despatched it by special messenger.

“It is of no use waiting longer, I see,”

she said to herself. "Melicent will never be safe from these persecutions till he is bound over to keep the peace, or, rather, keep his distance. Poor Melicent!" she sighed, "will she ever feel safe again? To be sure, Mrs. Logan says 'it's a long lane that has no turning,' but if we simply stand and look, we will never eventuate the good that may lie beyond. Indeed, it will require some diplomatic skill to weather Cape Difficulty and get round the turn. But he and I were fair good friends and neighbours not so very long ago, and perhaps that may have its influence now. There is usually some soft spot in the hardest heart, if we can only apply our touchstone properly."

So reasoned and philosophised Mrs.

Johnstone, and, in the meantime, her summons had raised quite a fresh tumult in Macdonald's breast. He had gone from his short interview with Melicent in fierce and angry mood. She had not only declined his overtures and extinguished his hopes, but she had called him "false" and a "coward," and it did not mend matters that he could not deny being both. But her scornful words and her evident loathing turned the current of his longing feelings towards her into gall, and stirred up the puddle that flowed through his veins and danced about his heart, miry waters of a polluted and bitter fountain, and he only remained in the neighbourhood that he might take steps for revenge.

But now, this call to Ardentiny House,

what did it portend? Had Melicent relented? If so, then he would forgive her cruel words! He had always been subject to sudden fluctuation of feeling; "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways," and it was quite in his line to be one moment plotting the yet unaccomplished ruin of Melicent's social status, which he knew now would be almost worse than death to her, and the next instant ready to take her to his breast.

In a tumult of excited hope, he replied, "that he would wait on Mrs. Johnstone that evening." He felt that it could not be too soon; in fact, he could scarcely let the messenger depart without him. Only for decorum's sake he restrained his eager steps.

“I’m going down to the House to-night, mother,” he said, as they two sat down to the old lady’s early tea, on this occasion almost untasted by our expectant hero.

“Doun tae the hoose, are ye?” she echoed; “ye’re maybe no heeding, but I’m jalousing ye’ll no see Miss Ramsey the night. The lad that brought the letter tel’t Callum that she gaed awa i’ the morning i’ the carriage, and didna come back wi’t.”

Andrew gave utterance to a short expletive, in a voice that made his mother start, and then he reflected that he had better keep quiet for the present. He must keep his appointment with Mrs. Johnstone at any rate—he was too good and methodical a business man to neglect

such an arrangement. Either as the judge on the bench or the prisoner at the bar, he would have come up to time with the same unconscious sense of fitness, and a practical application of principle clearly at variance with the code of morals he practised in what he would, perhaps, have called—in contradistinction to the one subject on which he had any sense of duty—everyday life. Therefore, it never entered into his calculations not to go to Ardentiny House ; but he was in no hurry now, and he sauntered down the well-known road that first and last had given back to him every variety of beat by which the human foot betrays the workings of the heart within.

It was a quiet still evening in the begin-

ning of March. The weather, even in these high regions, had been lovely for the time of year. The air had been soft and balmy, with a promise of spring in it; but to-night it had a raw, chilly feeling, the forerunner, most probably, of some sudden change, though as yet not a breath of wind disturbed the deep repose that reigned through the glen.

The stillness and the dead, calm cold fell on Andrew with a saddening influence. He left the Lodge savage and defiant, he entered the House sulky and sorrowful.

Mrs. Johnstone came to him at once.

"I must not keep him waiting," she reflected, "or his pride will fire up instant!"

Neither did she keep him in suspense

as to the nature of her business with him. A few kindly inquiries as to his health, and then she plunged into the matter on hand.

“Miss Ramsey tells me that she had a most unpleasant meeting with you yesterday, and I wish to know if she could be saved the recurrence of such a thing for the future?”

“Miss Ramsey!” echoed Andrew. “Perhaps you are not aware that your sister is no more Miss Ramsey than either you or me, and hasn’t been for some time.”

Andrew durst not say what she was; he had always stood somewhat in awe of Mrs. Johnstone, and confined himself prudently to negative assertions.

“Oh, I know all my sister’s painful

story," replied Mrs. Johnstone, with a wave of her hand—a way she had of disposing of disagreeable subjects—I know all that, and I am not disputing the justice of your claim. I only wanted to ask you if, as a man of honour," she said, with a touch of irony, lost upon the insensate she addressed, "if, as a man of honour, and under the peculiar circumstances, it would not be as well to let it drop. It can do no good persisting. You may annoy her—may even cause her to leave the country; but it seems unreasonable that you should push matters to that extremity, when you thereby reap no solid advantage."

"Let it drop!" repeated Andrew meditatively; "you are asking a hard thing, Mrs. Johnstone, harder than perhaps you know

of. But for my mother, I am a friendless man ; and at my time of life I cannot hope to form new ties." (Mrs. Johnstone could scarcely conceal a smile as she thought what a facility the man before her had for forming ties.) "Is there no hope, do you think, that in time things would be different?"

"I can give you none," replied Mrs. Johnstone ; "I am persuaded that my sister will never look upon you in any other light than a deceiver ; indeed," said the lady, forgetting her *rôle*, and drawing herself up with great dignity, "I could not advise her."

Macdonald felt cowed ; none knew better than this lady how unworthy his conduct had been, and to this approach

to a recrimination he had not a word to say.

"I do not wish to give any offence," she went on, "but if you could see your way to parting with the record of that wretched business, we would be more than glad to take it on your own terms."

Andrew pricked up his ears. Here was a chance for adding to the little store that was dearer to his avaricious heart than aught the world held. The set lines about his mouth relaxed. The sour determined air gave place to a more cordial expression, and Mrs. Johnstone noted these favourable signs with pleasure, and had hopes of a bargain being come to.

"Indeed, Mr. Macdonald," she said briskly, "I do not see that I am asking

anything unreasonable ; we'll allow that it's a breach of promise, and all that, and anything you like to name by way of damages will be cheerfully conceded. Shall we say a thousand ?”

“ No ! not for two of them !” cried Andrew ; “ I'll not renounce my claim on your sister for a penny less than the full amount of the legacy the baronet left me, and which would have been mine to-day, but for that infernal business.”

“ Consider the lady's portionless condition,” parleyed Mrs. Johnstone.

“ Consider what I am giving up,” argued Andrew ; “ you may think it a large sum, so of course it is ; but if I thought there was a chance—only you say there isn't—not all the gold in the Bank of England (and there's

a reserve of twenty millions at the present time)," added Andrew, even at this crisis relapsing into statistics, "would tempt me."

Mrs. Johnstone, who during his residence in the Highlands had had numberless small transactions with him, entertained a private notion of her own that for the gold in the Bank of England he would sell not only his wife, but his own soul besides. Now she reflected, "What were thousands in comparison to Melicent's peace?" Presently she spoke :

"You also promise to keep all quiet, so far as publicity is concerned, and never, on any pretence, annoy Miss Ramsey again."

Andrew winced. The bargain and the terms of it were equally distasteful to him ;

but, on the other hand, there was the five thousand, not to speak of the duplicate certificate, which would be good for perhaps even a larger sum when the time came for using it. He took out his pocket-book and produced the paper.

Mrs. Johnstone started.

Was the fellow actually carrying about him the record of Melicent's mistake? It quickened her pulses and her movements too. The cheque was filled up and signed without a pause ; and, as it left her hand, she took with the other the obnoxious thing and committed it to the flames.

A little more conversation, on that much-discussed subject, that favourite stop-gap of awkward pauses, the weather—the unusual degree of heat they had been expe-

riencing, the rapid sinking of the mercury (Macdonald was always eloquent—at least, long-winded—on barometers and thermometers, and meters of all kinds)—and then he rose to go. Mrs. Johnstone made no attempt to detain him. He had never been a favourite with her, and he had been steadily sinking in her estimation, as new phases of his unlovely character were disclosed to her. Now she only felt that positive dislike and discomfort with which you sit in the company of the abject; she had been exercising the utmost restraint on herself during the time he had been with her, and the only wish that remained to her was to “speed the parting guest.”

“It’s come on a coarse night, Mr. Macdonald,” said Wright, as he held open the

door. "You're not staying the evening, sir?" he added, thinking it too good a chance to lose for a little fling at the man who had often been needlessly haughty and harsh to him.

"No! my mother is waiting for me," said Andrew, quite humbly, and out he stepped into the night. But what a change had come to it: as he entered Ardentiny House not a breath of air was stirring, and nature was arrayed in her green mantle, or, at least, such fragments of it as winter blasts had left to her; now she was robed in white, and the landscape, like a pale ghost, stretched cold and bleak. The wind, too, was sougning through the boughs with an eerie sound, or swirling in wild eddies along the road, licking up the fallen snow

and dashing it into fantastic shapes and wreaths—dashing it, too, hard in the face of the now panting traveller ; for it would have tried a strong man, this sudden storm, and Macdonald's strength was at a low ebb. For awhile he struggled on through blinding drift and uncertain footing, never thinking of his danger. Then the possibility of difficulty occurred to him—nothing more.

“If the snow had only been falling,” he thought ; “but it's this confounded rising that's playing the mischief with me.”

For another half-hour he fought and battled with the storm, now sinking knee-deep in a huge wreath, anon brought to a standstill by the fury of the drift as it swept over and around him, blinding and choking

him. It was difficult, too, to distinguish the road. In many parts it ran through the open without fence or visible landmark, and when he began to be uncertain about that, he was too experienced a hillsman not to realise his danger and feel discouraged by it.

As his feet sank in the snow, his heart sank in his bosom, and he would fain have sat down to rest and think, but for the fear of being overpowered by drowsiness, which he well knew was but the beginning of the end to storm-beset travellers. Still he struggled on; heartless, aimless struggles they were, for he now believed that he was only getting further into the hills, as, had he kept the road, he must by this time have reached a shepherd's cottage half-way be-

tween the lodge and the house. But no friendly light or cheering sound of dogs reached him, and the conviction forced itself upon him that he had mistaken his way, and was now he knew not where. As long as his fast ebbing strength sustained him, he circled round and round, as people do who have lost themselves, and then with a groan he sank on the earth.

“God or man, help me!” he cried, “I can do no more.”

“My mother is waiting for me,” were the last words that mortal ears heard from his lips, but it was on the bosom of Mother Nature that he lay down exhausted, and with a soft white pall she covered up her unworthy son.



CHAPTER XI.

IN MEMORIAM.

MR. MACDONALD'S last words, like his life, had been a lie, unless he was speaking with prophetic foresight of that mother who so soon took him to her bosom. His own old mother never waited for him. He was far too independent a gentleman for any ordinary mortal to follow out in his vagaries. He went and came as he pleased, and allowed no questions, and seldom volunteered any information. So on this night, as on

many others, Mrs. Macdonald retired to rest at her usual time, though Andrew had not returned, without anxiety or dread.

If Melicent, as she believed when she came to hear of the fact, was made restless and uneasy by the presence of Macdonald in her vicinity (how near her she never knew), no such disquieting premonitions warned the old woman of her son's fate.

Naturally, it is only to sensitive and highly strung imaginations that these fore-shadowings ever come in sufficient force to make themselves felt. Coarse and material natures repel the magnetic fluid, whose subtle ether conveys in its mysterious voice that indescribable cognizance of passing events which we cannot call foreknowledge, yet when the facts reach us through the

bodily senses, we feel as if we had known them all before.

If no alarm was felt at the Lodge when "the Maister" did not make his appearance at night, so neither in the morning were fears excited when it was discovered that he was still absent; and his mother sat down, in perfect contentment, to her solitary breakfast, at the very hour when the shepherds, in looking for their sheep, found this lost one, stark and stiff, on the bleak hillside, and were even then carrying home to the bereaved parent the lifeless corpse of her son. The first intimation she had of the approach of the sad procession was from one of the "twa lassies," who rushed into the parlour with blanched face, shrieking, "Oh! mis-

tress, mistress ! what's yon coming up the road ?”

“Lassie ! lassie ! what can 't be ?” she cried, and then, clasping the affrighted girl's hands in her trembling old fingers, she waited till the bearers came in with their unconscious burden, and laid it prone on the hearth at her feet.

Then she gave a great cry, and dropping on the floor beside the lifeless clay, she tenderly unwound the wrappings the kind-hearted shepherds had divested themselves of to cast about the body that would never feel cold or heat again. Soon the house filled with sympathising neighbours—it almost seemed as if the hills had opened and poured forth a contingent ready detailed for the service, so rapidly did the news fly, and so

eagerly did the inhabitants of every cottage hurry forth to offer assistance to the afflicted family. From the first it was feared that death had, indeed, claimed its own ; but, in deference to the wishes of the agonised mother, who refused to believe in her loss, a messenger was despatched to summon medical assistance, and, till it came, willing hands wrought incessantly at the hopeless task of nursing back to life the busy scheming heart that was now at rest for ever.

At last the doctor arrived, to stop with authoritative voice unavailing effort; one moment he stooped beside the body, the next he took the stricken mother by the hand, and gently, but firmly, led her from the room.

“Is he gane?” she cried, “my son Andrew! Oh, sir! can naething be done to save him?” and, reading her fate in the doctor’s grave face, she wrung her withered hands, exclaiming, “Eh, sirs! that the auld useless trunk should be spared, an’ the bonnie saplin’ cut down!”

But why linger over the mournful scene? Soon the sad news reached Ardentiny House, and affected Mrs. Johnstone scarcely less than the poor old mother, whose sensibilities were somewhat blunted by age. Naturally her first thought was for the unhappy man who had been called away so unexpectedly; her next, for the cheque she had given him, at his own request, made payable to bearer. Should it fall into dishonest hands! She sent for

George Logan at once, and told him all the particulars.

“We must look after the pocket-book,” he said, “but it may be as well to wait a few days. Perhaps his mother may have it all safe ; she’s sharp enough about money matters. Most likely she will want my help and advice after the funeral. So we can put it off till then.”

But they had not so long to wait. A gillie about the place sent for Mr. Logan to “speak ta Tonal’.” It turned out that Mr. Logan was wanted rather to listen than to speak ; for Donald, in his wanderings about the hill, either for business or pleasure, had come on a well-soaked looking article, which he now held by its extreme edge, and eyed with evident distrust.

"An' wad Mr. Logan tak' it fra her? for it's hersel' doubts it pe no verra canny."

George knew it at once—poor Macdonald's pocket-book—the very thing they were so anxious about.

"I shall give it to his mother, Donald, and see that you are properly rewarded." And Donald, who evidently connected the black-looking thing with the dead man he had helped to carry home, and whose superstitious mind was already deeply burdened with that painful episode, salaamed respectfully to his honour, and went off with a lighter heart. Mr. George Logan first carried the book to Mrs. Johnstone.

"We may be quite sure it has never been opened," he said in reply to that

lady's fears. "Donald was almost too frightened to touch it, let alone to look into it; but I've a notion 'dis chile' will take a peep."

George found the precious bit of paper in the innermost compartment, crisp and fresh as on the day it had been placed there by the hand that was never again to handle it. Beside it lay another paper that instantly attracted his attention. On the two outside corners were a couple of red wafers.

"Halloa! what have we here?" he cried. And Mrs. Johnstone bent over to see, as he unfolded the duplicate of the paper she had paid so dear for, and held it up to her astonished gaze.

"Poor fellow!" she said, "had he lived,

this would likely have cost us another five thousand—sad ! sad !” and she pressed her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out the cruel vision. “What a fate has Milly been saved !”

“ Oh, yes ! Milly’s all right,” said George. “ But what’s to be done about this ? If we help ourselves to it, it will be taking a leaf out of Macdonald’s book in more ways than one. What a nuisance,” he added, “ and there’s so much need for secrecy.”

“ Dear ! dear !” sighed Mrs. Johnstone. “ Will this miserable business of Melicent’s never be done ?”

Suddenly George brightened up. “ I have it,” he cried, clapping his hand on his thigh, “ I’ll wait till after to-morrow, and then I’ll take the pocket-book with all its

contents—you know Mrs. Macdonald cannot read a syllable of writing—and I'll show her the cheque, and explain to her that it's all her own! Then under cover of that tremendous revelation, I'll show her this paper and tell her it's an old agreement with the Ramseys—of no use now—and would she give it to me? That will be all correct and proper, won't it?"

George carried out his plan, and the plan carried out his expectations. The poor old woman was quite overwhelmed when she heard that she was the possessor of such wealth.

"An' wad Mr. Logan just tak' the buke back wi' him, an' put things a' right for her; an' gin there was ony orra thing he wanted for hissel', he was mair than walcome."

Mrs. Johnstone had the pleasure of a supplementary rite over this last record of Melicent's false step; and now, in every sense of the word, that lady was free. More than that, the woman who, all unknowing, was her mother-in-law, took it into her head to make her her heiress.

"I've heerd," she said, explaining the matter to George Logan, who was the only man of business she would ever employ. "I've heerd she gat naething fra her billy, auld Sir Dauvid, an' I've neither kith nor kin, that I can maist count wi', an' it's Ramsey money" (George had told her, as he was quite entitled to do, that Mrs. Johnstone had paid her son his legacy), "an' tae the Ramseys it maun gae."

There seemed a kind of retributive

justice running through it all. After a time, Melicent came back to Ardentiny, and devoted herself to Andrew's mother, and overcame her repugnance to her, and actually wept when the old woman died, though she had shed no tears for the son, but took an attack of her old palpitation instead when they told her of his sad and unexpected end. But she never ventured on another husband, or made any second attempt to change her name, but died as she had lived, "Miss Ramsey." But that was after years of a well-spent life, given up to her fellow-creatures, and the glens around Ardentiny House had cause to bless her for the good deeds done there.

The Rev. John Logan died the same year as old Mrs. Macdonald, cut off in his

prime, because "the good die first." And when the lamp is trimmed and burning, what better than that the Bridegroom should call? So he was gathered to his fathers as a shock of corn "early ripe," and David, his son, reigned in his stead.

But David, with the best intentions, utterly failed in his self-imposed vocation, viz., to keep the old home to his mother, and the young ones. For having dreamed "love's young dream," and "to rid it" engaged himself to one of Ella's school friends, Mrs. Logan soon saw that she was standing in the way of the young couple, and Ardentiny Lodge being then vacant, she removed there with such of her numerous family as remained beside her. But with George for a second father, both able and willing,

the boys were all provided for, as they grew up, and the girls had more homes in their brother's houses than they could occupy.

We leave our old friend Milly as we found her, bright and happy, as simple and innocent in her pleasures as Mrs. Logan-Ramsey, of Otterburn, as she had been as Milly Johnstone in the Highland glen. Perhaps her greatest weakness was her strong belief in her husband, but whenever "failings lean to virtue's side," what remains to be said?

THE END.

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